

STORIES FROM
MEDIAEVAL ROMANCE

TOLD BY

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OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1913

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PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH, NEW YORK, TORONTO
MELBOURNE AND BOMBAY

PREFACE

IN re-telling some of the mediaeval stories, I have tried not only to make the selection as varied as possible, but to include some of those not very generally known. One tale, that of 'Tom a Lincoln', cannot be called a mediaeval romance at all, since it was written early in the seventeenth century, but I have given it a place because it is in the direct line of succession from that type of fanciful romance of which 'Huon of Bordeaux' is a good example, and moreover because it illustrates how persistent was the taste for mediaeval story, especially for that branch of it which was connected with the court of King Arthur and the Round Table.

My thanks are due to many authors and publishers for their kindness in allowing me to adapt stories already in some form or other given to the world—to Messrs. Wells Gardner, Darton & Co. for permission to re-tell 'King Robert of Sicily' and 'Floris and Blanchefleur' from Mr. Harvey Darton's *Wonder Book of Old Romance*; to Messrs. Routledge & Co. for 'Placidus' from the *Mediaeval Tales* series, for 'Tom a Lincoln' and 'Reynard the Fox' from Thorn's *Early English Prose Romances*, and for 'The Merchant of Pavia' from *Tales from the Decameron*.
to Messrs J. M. Dent & Sons for 'The Seven Sleepers'

from the Temple Classics edition of *The Golden Legend* to Mr. Fisher Unwin for my version of 'Melusine' drawn chiefly from Mr. Ashton's *Romances of Chivalry*. I am especially grateful to Mr. F. W. Bourdillon, who has not only given me permission to quote his delightful verses in *Aucassin and Nicolette*, but has been so generous as to send me two unpublished translations of his own, with leave to make use of them. 'Constant the Emperor' and 'The Friendship of Amys and Amile' are attempts on my part to adapt these thirteenth-century stories to the purpose of this book; I cannot hope to have preserved the charm of Mr. Bourdillon's translation.

I have to add my thanks to Mr. Alfred Noyes for permission to quote in 'Robin Hood' several stanzas from his poem 'Sherwood'.

N. S.

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THE FRIENDSHIP OF AMYS AND AMILE

This story was known in France, and written down, some time in the thirteenth century, while Henry III and Edward I were reigning in England. Several people in modern days have put it into English, and the tale as told here is taken from Mr. Bourdillon's translation.

ONCE long ago in the castle of Béricain in France, there was born a baby over whom his father and his mother greatly rejoiced, for they had no other children. 'If God wills that he should live,' said the knight, his father, 'we will carry him to Rome to be baptized.'

Now at the same time in another castle in a different part of France, there was born a little boy whose father, the Count of Anvers, had a strange dream concerning him.

He thought that he saw the Pope of Rome baptizing and consecrating with holy oil many little babies, and when he awoke the dream was so present with him that he took counsel with a wise man, who thus explained the vision :

'Rejoice greatly, count,' said he, 'for your son shall be brave and good, and you shall carry him to Rome to be baptized by the Pope himself. For such is the will of God.'

This baby grew and flourished, and when he was two years old, the count his father and many followers set out with him for Rome, there to celebrate his baptism.

8 THE FRIENDSHIP OF AMYS AND AMILE

At Lucca, a city on the road to Rome, they rested, and there the count met another nobleman, also on his way to that holy place, with a little boy whose age was the same as that of his own son.

So the children met, and immediately they loved each other so much that they were never happy apart; all day they played together, and at night they slept in the same bed.

When they reached Rome, the two fathers went before the Pope, and laying precious gifts at his feet, besought him to baptize the children who had come to him from far away.

'Bestow these gifts upon the poor,' answered the Pope. 'As for the children, I will gladly baptize them.'

To the son of the knight of Béricain he gave the name of Amys; the other little boy, the child of the Count of Anvers, he called Amile, and after the ceremony of baptism he gave to each child a costly cup enriched with gold and gems; and the cup of Amys was in every respect like that bestowed upon Amile.

Then the boys returned, each to his own home, but Amys never forgot Amile, nor was he ever forgotten by him.

The years passed, and Amys grew to be a strong, brave, and good man. His father died at last, commending his son to God and praying him never to forget his friend Amile, who had been baptized with him by the Pope in Rome. 'You are like brothers in face and form,' he said, 'and friends you must ever remain.'

Now after the death of his father, Amys suffered greatly, for evil men who envied him drove him from his castle and his lands, and with a few followers he was left to face the world.

Let us trust in God,' said he to his companions, 'and let us go to the court of Count Amile, who is my friend and comrade.'

So with his little company, Amys set forth, and reached the home of Amile only to find that Amile, hearing of the knight's death, had already departed for the castle of Béricain with intent to comfort his friend. Thus they missed one another, but each vowed that he would never rest till he was reunited with his companion.

Amys wandered far in his search, and came at last to the home of a nobleman, who begged him to remain at his castle, and gave him his daughter in marriage.

For a year and a half Amys lingered there with his young wife, but at the end of that time he said to himself:

'I have done ill in that I have ceased to seek for Amile,' and leaving his new home, he travelled on towards Paris.

Now for two years Amile had sought to find Amys, and at this time he too was approaching Paris, and meeting a pilgrim on his way, he stopped him, and asked, according to his custom, whether he had seen aught of the Count of Béricain whom men had driven from his heritage.

The pilgrim answered that he knew nothing of such a count, and Amile taking off his coat, gave it to the poor man.

'Pray to God for me that I may find my friend,' said he, and leaving the pilgrim, he went his way.

Now the pilgrim journeyed on, and towards evening he met, as he believed, the same man who that day had spoken with him, and when the stranger asked him if he knew aught of Amile, Count of Anvers, he thought

himself mocked. 'This morning thou wast Amile!' he said, 'and thou didst ask me concerning Amys, knight of Béricain!' For the two friends resembled each other so closely that the pilgrim was deceived.

'Be not angry,' said the knight. 'I am Amys, and I seek my comrade Amile. Pray to God for me that I may find him.'

He gave the pilgrim money, and the man urged him to enter Paris hastily, where he would surely meet his friend. So Amys made all speed, but Amile had already left the city, and it was not till the next day that he and his followers met a company of knights riding through a meadow outside the walls of Paris.

'These men are armed against us!' he cried. 'Let us meet them and fight to defend ourselves.' With lances couched and swords drawn, the two companies rode to the encounter, but before they began to fight, Amys exclaimed:

'Who are you knights who come to kill the banished Amys?'

And at these words their leader cried, 'O most dear Amys, I am Amile, and I have sought thee for two years.' Then the two men dismounted, and embracing, swore fealty to one another on Amile's sword, and together in great joy they travelled to the court of Charles, King of France, who received them well, and made Amys his treasurer, and gave a position of trust to Amile also.

For three years they lived together at the court of this king, till one day Amys said to his comrade, 'Fair sweet friend, I desire greatly to see once more the wife I have left so long. I go therefore to visit her, but remain thou at court, and I will return with all speed.'

Only beware of Arderis, who is thine enemy and a traitor.'

And Amile replied, 'I will heed thy words, but see that thou returnest quickly!'

So Amys went his way, but it was not long before trouble fell upon his friend, for Arderis the traitor, seeking to do him harm, accused him to the king of a grievous crime.

Now the king loved Amile, and when Arderis brought the charge against him, he said to his vassal, 'Fear not, but defend thyself. Take counsel and find some comrade who will befriend thee.'

So leave was given to Amile to seek for help, and he pledged himself to return on a certain day.

With a heavy heart he left the court, for though Arderis had shamefully betrayed him, the words he had spoken were true. Amile had indeed done wrong, and he knew he could not swear that Arderis had lied.

Now at that very time, Amys, who was returning from his journey, met his friend, and was amazed when Amile, dismounting from his horse, threw himself at his feet, and confessed his sin, and told him all that had befallen.

'Hearken!' said Amys, sighing, 'and I will tell thee what we must do. Let us change our clothes and our horses. Go thou to my home, and in thy guise I will return to court and do battle for thee against the traitor.'

And as Amys counselled, so it was done. The friends parted weeping, and Amile went to the house of Amys, whose wife, mistaking him for her own husband suddenly returned to her, was amazed and grieved not only because of his sadness, but also that he treated her as though she were a stranger. Amys, meanwhile, rode back to court

and was received as Amile, so closely did the comrades resemble one another.

And when the appointed time for the battle was come, Amile, in his friend's stead, rode forward to fight with Arderis, first swearing, and with truth, that he was innocent of the charge brought against him.

Manfully he fought, and at last, amidst the shouts of the crowd, he overbore the traitor, and cut off his head. Then the king was glad, and to the conqueror he gave his fair daughter Belisant in marriage, and with her a great sum in gold and silver, and a city for a dwelling-place. And Amys also rejoiced in his heart, for he knew that Amile loved the king's daughter, and that he had but to change places with his friend to make him happy. After the marriage festivities, he went secretly and in haste to the lodging where Amile lay, and told him all that had befallen; so in the place of Amys Amile returned to the king's daughter, whom he loved, and to the fair city which was henceforward his home, while Amys went back to his own wife.

Now it befell that as time passed, Amys was stricken with a terrible disease. He became a leper, and the love of his wife was turned to hate, so that oftentimes she tried to kill him. And in fear of her Amys begged two of his faithful servants to carry him to the castle of Béricain, his old home, trusting that his own retainers would receive and obey him as their lord.

So they set forth, and Amys forgot not to take with him the cup studded with jewels which he had received at his baptism. But when the folk at Béricain heard that their lord had returned, and that he was now a leper, they sallied from the castle and drove him from its gates,

saying, 'Get you gone, if you would not lose your life !' And Amys, stricken to the heart, bade his servants carry him to the church of St. Peter at Rome, where he had been baptized. There the Pope received him in pity and kindness, and for three years he lived in that city, till so great a famine fell that he was forced to travel onwards. Then he bethought him of his comrade Amile.

'O fair sons, no servants you !' he cried to his faithful followers. 'Take me to the city of Count Amile, who peradventure will succour me.' So the servants did as their lord commanded, and when they drew near the Court, Amile, hearing the rattle that was always sounded at the approach of a leper, and filled with pity for any man so afflicted, sent out strong wine to be given to the sufferer.

Now when the servant who had done his lord's bidding returned, he said to Amile, 'Sire, the sick man whom I visited had a cup so like the one in which by your commandment I took the wine, that had I not held your cup in my hand, I should have believed his to be the same.'

Then Amile cried, 'Go quickly and bring that man to me !'

So Amys was carried into the house of Amile, and though his illness had grievously changed him, Amile knew him for the friend who had faced death for him at the king's court, and won him the king's daughter to wife. And the friends wept together, and the wife of Amile, filled with gratitude for all that Amys had done for her husband, said, 'Remain with us, fair sir, for all that we have is yours !'

Then together they tended him and his faithful servants, and Amys stayed with them in peace.

Now it came to pass that one night, when the two friends were sleeping in the same room, Amys heard a voice saying :

‘ Amys, sleepest thou ? ’

‘ I sleep not, fair dear comrade,’ answered Amys, thinking that Amile had spoken. But the voice went on, ‘ I am Raphael, the angel of our Lord who am come to tell thee the remedy which will heal thee, for He has heard thy prayers. Thou shalt tell Amile thy comrade to slay his two children and wash thee in their blood. Thus thou shalt receive thy healing.’

The angel departed, and Amys, filled with grief and horror, heard the voice of Amile asking, ‘ Who is it, comrade, that spake to thee ? ’

‘ There was none,’ said Amys. ‘ I have but prayed to our Lord as I am wont to do.’

‘ Nay,’ answered Amile, ‘ but some one has spoken. Tell me, fair brother ! ’

And at last, weeping, Amys told him the words of Raphael, the angel of the Lord. Now at first Amile was full of anger, forcing himself to believe that Amys had deceived him. But when he saw the grief and horror of his friend, he knew that God had indeed spoken by the mouth of his angel, and he bethought him of all the love and constancy that Amys had borne him, and of those words of the Gospel, ‘ Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them.’ So he arose, and, seeking his wife, bade her go to the church in which she was wont to pray.

Then he took his sword, and without giving himself time to waver he went into the chamber where his two lovely little boys lay asleep in one bed. And as he looked at them the poor father suddenly broke into

tears, and the children awoke, and seeing him began to laugh and play.

Then Amile, steeling himself for the dreadful deed, raised his sword and killed them, and leaving the pretty boys in haste he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded, and immediately Amys was healed of his leprosy. With choice raiment Amile then clothed his friend, and together Amys and Amile went to the church to render thanks to God.

Now when the people of the city heard of this miracle they ran to see Amys, and with them came the wife of Amile.

'I knew well the clothing of these two!' she cried, 'but which is my husband Amile?' For now that he was restored to health Amys was so like his friend that all marvelled.

Then said the countess again, 'I desire greatly to know how this miracle was worked.'

But Amile, sick at heart, answered her thus: 'Let us give thanks to the Lord, and trouble not how it came to pass,' for he greatly feared that she would ask for the children. And indeed, before much time had passed, the countess said, 'Let us send for the children to rejoice over them.'

'Lady, let them sleep,' replied Amile, and because for sorrow he could no longer stay in his wife's presence, he went to the chamber where the children lay. And behold! the little boys, whom he had left white and still, were playing happily in the bed, and only round the throat of each was a mark like a small scarlet thread! Who shall say with what joy Amile took them in his arms, and carrying them to Amys and his wife, cried, 'Rejoice greatly, lady, for our sons, whom by the

commandment of the angel I had slain, are alive, and by their blood is Amys healed.'

Great joy there was in the city at this miracle, and much did Amys rejoice. And after some time he went and laid siege to the castle of Béricain, and having subdued it graciously received and pardoned his enemies, and lived there with the eldest son of Amile serving the Lord.

Now in the end it came to pass that Amys and Amile died together fighting in battle and were buried side by side, for as God had joined them in life in one accord, so in death were they not divided.

THE STORY OF CONSTANT THE EMPEROR.

Like the preceding tale, 'Constant the Emperor' is a thirteenth-century French romance, and the following version is based on the translation made by Mr. Bourdillon.

IN old days the city that is now Constantinople was called *Byzantium*, and at one time it was ruled by the Emperor Muselin, who was a heathen, but learned, skilled in many arts, and above all in the science of astronomy, so that he knew the courses of the stars and how sometimes they work for good, and sometimes for ill, towards mankind.

Now it chanced that one night when the emperor, with a certain follower whom he trusted, was walking by moonlight about the streets of his city, he heard a man praying aloud at the window of a house. The man was a Christian, and he prayed that when he had a child God would send it into the world in a fortunate hour.

'I would have speech with this man,' said the emperor, 'for greatly do I wish to know at what hour he desires the birth of a child.'

Therefore the knight, his companion, went to seek the Christian, and brought him before the emperor, who inquired of him what his prayer might betoken.

'Sir,' said the Christian (who knew not that it was the emperor with whom he spoke), 'God has heard my petition, for a fair son is born to me at the fortunate hour. I am a scholar; I know of the courses of the stars,

and inasmuch as my son was born under the happy guidance of the planets, he shall prosper.'

'Tell me now in what fashion shall your son prosper?' asked the emperor.

'Willingly,' replied the man. 'For know, sir, that a child born at such a moment will have to wife the daughter of the emperor, and will be lord of this city and this land.'

Then the emperor feared, for he had a little daughter born eight days before the son of the poor scholar, and, because he too knew the courses of the stars and their influence, he trembled.

'Truly you believe a great thing,' said he to the Christian, who went his way, while the emperor spoke on this wise to the knight, his companion.

'Go thou quickly to this man's house, and carry off the child in secret, for never shall the son of a churl have my daughter to wife.'

So the knight found the baby, who was wrapped in swaddling clothes, and carried it privily to his master. Then the emperor took a knife and so cruelly stabbed the child's little body that it seemed dead; and he was about to strike him once again, when the knight cried: 'Ah, sir! for the love of God let be. The child is already dead, and it helps nothing to stab him yet again. Leave him now, and I will drown him in the sea.'

'Aye,' returned the emperor. 'Do so, for I hate it overmuch.'

The knight then wrapped the poor baby in a coverlet of silk, but when he had left the emperor's presence he had pity on the child, and drowned it not, but left it so wrapped at the door of an abbey, where the monks were even then singing their matins.

And when the monks came forth they heard the baby's cries, and the abbot caused him to be taken up and carried within, marvelling greatly at the child's cruel wound.

As soon as it was daylight he sent for surgeons, and at a great price the little boy was healed and his strength came back to him.

'He shall be called *Constant*,' said the abbot, 'because it has cost much to make him whole.' Then he sought for a good nurse, and the child grew and flourished, though never did he lose the mark of the cruel sword which had wellnigh killed him.

So beautiful did he become that the monks loved and cherished him. He was put to school, where he learnt quickly, and oftentimes he rode on horseback behind the abbot, who had been to him as a father.

Now it happened when Constant was about twelve years old that the abbot had need of speech with the emperor, for the lands of the abbey were his, and the monks were subject to the heathen ruler.

With chaplains and squires and pages in his train he travelled therefore to the castle, taking with him a fair gift; and behind him rode his pupil Constant.

Now when the emperor saw the boy he was amazed at his beauty, and he inquired of the abbot concerning him. And he called to Constant, who stood holding the hat of the abbot, and spoke to him, saying that it was great pity so fair a youth should be a Christian; and though the abbot grieved at such words, he dared not make answer.

'Tell me now,' said the emperor presently, 'where found you this fair boy?' And the abbot disclosed then the manner of the child's coming, and how he

had caused the surgeons to heal him of a terrible wound, which they did at so great a price as to earn him the name of *Constant* (or, as it was sometimes written, *Castant*).

Now when the Emperor Muselin heard these words he knew in his heart that this and no other was the child he had sought to slay, and taking thought, he asked the abbot to give the boy into his keeping. And the abbot, taking counsel with the wisest men of his monastery, sent Constant to be the page of the emperor, who ceased not to ponder how he might kill him. For greatly was his wrath kindled when he thought that the son of a churl might take his daughter to wife.

And when, as it chanced, he travelled into a far land to the wars, he took Constant with him; and presently wrote a letter which he gave to the boy, bidding him depart with it and go back to the castle at Byzantium, where he should deliver it to the steward who kept his household.

So Constant set forth, and knew not that he carried his own death, for in the letter there was a commandment to the steward, written with the emperor's hand, and signed with his seal, to kill instantly the bearer of that paper. Joyfully he journeyed, and in less than fifteen days he reached the city of Byzantium, and rode on horseback into the great fair garden of the emperor's palace. And because all the folk about the palace were at dinner, he dismounted from his horse to wait till he could find the steward and deliver to him the emperor's letter. But the day was hot, and Constant being wearied from his journey lay down in the shade of a tree and fell asleep. Now when the fair daughter of the emperor had risen from the table, she went into the garden with

her maidens, and they played together, chasing one another along the pleasant paths till they came to the tree beneath which lay Constant: flushed was he with sleep, and like unto a rose. And when the fair daughter of the emperor cast her eyes upon him it seemed to her that never had she beheld so fair a boy. She looked upon him, and then dismissing all but one maiden whom she most trusted, she took her hand and said,

'Fair companion, this is the most beauteous person of a man I ever saw. He brings letters, and fain would I know what they say.'

Then the two maidens bending over the youth took the letters, and the emperor's daughter read them, and began grievously to cry, saying, 'Certes, here is great sorrow,' and straightway with her companion she entered the palace, and, strictly charging her to be secret in the matter, she disclosed to her what the emperor her father had written.

'Lady, what desire you to do?' asked the maiden.

'That will I tell you,' answered her mistress. 'I will put in his box other letters, saying that the emperor my father commands the steward to give me to wife to this fair youth, and that a great feast be made to all the folk of the land.'

'But, lady,' said the maiden, 'how will you have the seal of your father?'

'The seal is ready,' she made answer, 'for my father gave me leaves of parchment sealed with his seal, whereon nothing is written. On these I will write all that I desire.'

'Lady,' said her friend, 'this is well, but make haste lest he wake.'

So the emperor's fair daughter went to her coffer

and drew forth the parchments, and on them she wrote in this wise:

‘I, Muselin, Emperor of Greece and of Byzantium, to my castelain of Byzantium, greeting. I command you to give to the bearer of these letters my fair daughter to wife, according to our faith, for I have heard and know truly that he is a high person, and well worthy to have my daughter. And make great joy and great feasting to all those of the city and of all my country.’

In haste then did the daughter of the emperor and the maiden again seek Constant, who still slept. And when they had placed this letter, signed with the seal, in the box beside him, they began to sing, and Constant, awaking, marvelled to see the fair maiden, and very courteously returned her greeting.

‘Who art thou? Where art thou going?’ asked the daughter of the emperor. And when Constant told her that he sought the steward, to whom he must deliver the emperor’s letter, she took him by the hand and led him to the chamber where the castelain was.

Very joyously the maiden kissed the seal of the emperor her father, for she said it was long since she had news of him. And when the steward after he had read the letter rose up and kissed the hand of Constant, she pretended to marvel, and begged that the steward would read this letter to her in private.

And when she had come into a room in the castle and the steward had given her the letter, she made appearance that she was beyond measure astonished.

‘Lady, it behoves us to do the will of my lord your father,’ said the steward, ‘for otherwise we may be blamed overmuch.’ But the emperor’s fair daughter, dissembling her joy, would not consent thereto till all

the barons and the powerful men of the land had given their counsel that she should do as her father commanded. So Constant was wedded to the emperor's daughter according to the heathen faith, and for fifteen days there was mirth and feasting in Byzantium, and great joy.

Now when the Emperor Muselin was returning to his city, messengers went out to meet him, and when he inquired of them how the city fared, they answered that it was full of joy and feasting.

'And why is this so?' asked the emperor.

'Sir, know you not well?' they replied.

'Nay, verily,' said the emperor, 'but tell it me.'

Then the messengers recounted all that had befallen, and how, having taken counsel with the barons and the powerful men of the land, the daughter of the emperor dared not go against a commandment written with her father's hand, and signed with his seal.

And the emperor pondered, and thought in his heart that what was ordained by the stars must needs come to pass, and that it behoved him to suffer it in patience. So when his fair daughter and her husband came forth from the city to meet him, he rejoiced over them greatly, and putting his hands on their two heads he blessed them according to the fashion of the heathen.

And that same night he again took thought, for he had asked to see the letter he had written concerning Constant, and well he guessed that his daughter had contrived the matter. Yet was he a wise man, and he held his peace, knowing that fate had so ordained the thing.

No great time was it till he died, and when Constant, who was brave and wise, became emperor, he greatly

honoured the abbot who had reared him, and by the grace of Góð his wife and all the people of his land were converted to the Christian faith.

Now to the son of Constant was given the name *Constantine*, and that city which till then was *Byzantium* was afterwards called Constantinople, because of the Emperor Constant, who at a great cost was healed of his wound.

KING ROBERT OF SICILY

This story could not have been written till after the Normans conquered Sicily in the eleventh century, about the time when they also conquered England. The romance is in Old French, and was suggested by an ancient legend about King Solomon.

A GREAT king once reigned in Sicily. He was brave, he had conquered many enemies, he ruled broad lands, he had great riches, and his kinsmen, one of whom was the Pope and another the Emperor of Germany, were mighty also in their day. But King Robert was haughty and arrogant, and, forgetting to give God the praise for all the fame that was his, he grew strong in his own conceit, a boaster, an unworthy servant of the King of Heaven.

Even when he went to the church to pray, his mind was full of worldly thoughts; of plans for further conquests, of dreams for more wealth and even greater renown.

One evening when he went to service in the minster and was listening idly to the chanting of the monks, something that they sang arrested his attention for a moment, and again and again the words re-echoed through his brain: '*He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.*'

The verse haunted him, and presently he beckoned to him a monk who was not singing, and asked him what such words could mean.

The monk in a whisper replied that God, who was all-powerful, could destroy rank and pride, and could raise poor and lowly men to high places of honour.

Then the king was very angry. 'Who can humble me?' he said. 'I have made many conquests, and men tremble before me. Go! You tell me lies.'

The monk slipped away, and as he leant back against his cushions watching the evening light through the west windows, gazing at the twinkling candles on the altar, and hearing the soft chanting in the gloom of the church, the king presently fell into a deep sleep. The prayers and the chanting ceased, the lights were put out, and in procession the monks left the church. But no one tried to wake the king, because a figure like his, crowned and robed, swept with his attendants through the wide west door, and all men saw their ruler enter his palace.

But when the sleeper awoke the church was dark, and he felt cold, stiff, and bewildered. Scarcely knowing at first where he was, he called for his servants, and then realizing that he was a prisoner in the empty cathedral, he began to beat upon the door to summon help.

At last one of the monks came hurrying to the church, and hearing a man's voice he thought a robber was within, and called to him angrily.

'Open the door! I am the king,' commanded Robert of Sicily, and the monk, firmly persuaded that a madman spoke, unbarred the door and stood back while the king strode away to his palace. But here a porter prevented his entrance.

'Stand away, knave! Dost thou not know me? I am your king,' said his master, in wrath. And when

the man jeered and scoffed, he threatened to have him thrown into a dungeon and hanged.

At last, in despair of getting rid of the poor fool who clamoured at the gate, the porter went into the hall where the king sat in state, and told him of the mad-man's words.

'Bring him to me,' said the king, and the porter went back and opened the gate. Then Robert of Sicily struck the man with violence, who, shouting for his friends to help him, threw into the mud the beggar who called himself king; and thus in a sad plight, with torn and soiled garments, he was brought into the audience hall. The king listened to the complaints of the porter, and then turning to Robert of Sicily, asked who he was that dared so to maltreat his servants.

'Right well you know who I am!' he returned. 'I am the king, and you have usurped my place. The Pope is my brother, and the Emperor of Germany is also my brother, and to them will I turn for help against you.'

Then laughter rang through the hall, and the king said:

'You shall be my fool, and for counsellor you shall have an ape. May he teach you wisdom!'

So the proud king's hair was shorn, and a dress of motley with cap and bells was given to him, and his rank was below that of the humblest servant in the palace. The dogs ate out of his plate, and he was the laughing-stock of the whole court. There was no one to pity him, no one to whom in his rage and trouble he could turn for help.

Yet his proud spirit was not broken, and every day when the usurper asked him, 'My fool, who are you?' he replied, 'I am the king.'

The days and weeks and months went by, and the kingdom was at peace and prospered, for the new ruler governed well and with wisdom, and under his sway the people were content. No one troubled about the poor jester who crouched with the dogs under the king's table, and must either eat with them or starve.

At length, when the new reign had lasted nearly three years, the Emperor of Germany sent ambassadors to his brother the king, proposing that they should meet in Rome and together stay for a while with the Pope.

Great preparations were made, and after some weeks the King of Sicily set out on his journey, followed by a great company of knights and noblemen, richly clad and fair to see. The king rode a snow-white horse, and was himself attired all in white, and so grand and splendid he appeared that all men looked upon him with awe and wonder.

Following in his train, with his cap and bells, and his fool's dress of motley hung with foxes' tails, rode Robert of Sicily. A grinning ape sat on his shoulder, and as he passed the crowd shouted and laughed, and derided the man who called himself king. And so at last the procession reached Rome, and with great affection the brothers met and embraced, speaking courteous words to one another. But when Robert of Sicily saw that his kinsmen accepted the stranger without doubt as their brother the king, he could restrain his anger no longer.

Rushing towards the Pope and the Emperor, he implored them to recognize him.

'The man you have embraced is a stranger!' he cried, 'a usurper, who by some magic trick has taken my crown and sceptre. I am the king!'

In vain he protested. In the eyes of his brothers he was only a madman, worthy of pity or contempt according to the nature of those who listened to his wild speech. So time went on; the king's visit came to an end, and he returned once more to Sicily, the fool riding in his train. But a change was going on in the heart of the poor forsaken jester. He remembered his past life of arrogance and disdain. He remembered how God had punished other rulers who had not kept His commandments. He thought of Nebuchadnezzar who became as the beasts of the field, and ate with them, as he was forced to eat with the dogs of the king's household. And again there came to his mind the words he had scorned: '*He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.*'

He was mighty, and he had been humbled. And as he thought, the king's heart melted within him, and he acknowledged his sin and prayed God to have mercy on His poor fool.

In time the palace was reached, and according to his daily custom the king called his jester before him.

'My fool, who are you?' he asked.

'Sire, I am your fool,' returned Robert of Sicily.

Then the king looked upon him long and fixedly. They were alone together, and presently he spoke.

'God has forgiven you,' he said. 'From this time forth, remember and fear Him. Cleanse your heart from the sin of pride, and know that even a king is poor and lowly before the King of Heaven.'

And as Robert of Sicily lifted his eyes, he saw before him a splendid and shining presence, all radiant with light.

'I come from heaven,' said this being. 'I was sent'

to guard your kingdom while you learnt your lesson of humility. I am an angel. You are the king.'

In a flash the radiant vision disappeared, and, looking down, Robert of Sicily saw, instead of his old garb of motley with its bells, the royal robe and the sceptre of a monarch.

He entered the palace hall, and his nobles and attendants bowed before him as of old, ignorant of all that had passed, and once more, though with a humbled heart, King Robert ruled in Sicily.

PLACIDUS

The tale of 'Placidus' comes from a Latin story-book called *Gesta Romanorum*, or *Deeds of the Romans*. As a matter of fact most of the stories are not Roman stories at all. They come from all over the world. Some are Arabian romances, some French, some English. But in the Middle Ages the memory of Rome as the greatest city in the world was so strong that the old writers loved to make all their characters Romans. If they spoke of a king, he was generally the 'Emperor of Rome', and in the same way a brave soldier was often 'a Roman general'. And the book was written in Latin because in olden days Latin was the language of scholars all over the world. In the reign of Elizabeth, certain tales from the *Gesta Romanorum* were translated into English, and Shakespeare used some of them for the stories of his plays. In *The Merchant of Venice*, for instance, the 'casket scene' in which Bassanio chooses wisely and wins Portia for his wife was suggested to Shakespeare by a tale in the *Gesta Romanorum* called 'The Three Caskets'.

In the days when Rome ruled the world, there lived a general, Placidus by name, who was commander-in-chief of the Emperor Trajan's armies. He was a brave and good man, but though some of the Roman subjects had become Christians, he and his wife remained worshippers of the ancient gods.

Placidus was a skilful hunter, and one day when with a great company he had ridden out to chase the deer, he saw a beautiful stag. It was of great size and strength, and before long it broke from the herd and disappeared into the thickest part of the forest. Leaving his friends to pursue the rest of the creatures, Placidus followed this

one; for never before had he seen an animal so marvellous for beauty and swiftness. The stag led him a weary chase, up hill and down dale, but Placidus kept it in sight, and finally saw the animal spring on to a rocky crag, from which it turned and faced him, looking at him fixedly with its lovely liquid eyes.

Reining in his horse, Placidus watched the stag, considering how he could reach its place of safety, and as he watched a wonder met his eyes; for slowly, above the creature's head, there appeared the shadowy form of a cross. Gradually it brightened and brightened, till the cross and a Figure upon it blazed like the sun in heaven, and Placidus, unable to bear its glory, fell to the ground stunned with amazement. Presently, recovering from his trance, he rose to his knees, and in trembling tones said, 'Declare what Thou wouldst have, that I may believe in Thee.'

Then from the Figure on the cross came a Voice, which answered him thus:

'I am Christ, O Placidus. I created heaven and earth; I caused the light to arise, and divided it from the darkness. I appointed days and seasons and years. I formed man out of the dust of the earth; and I became incarnate for the salvation of mankind. I was crucified, and buried, and on the third day I rose again.'

Overcome with awe, Placidus declared his belief in the God whom he had hitherto despised, and the Voice told him to go into the city and be baptized as a Christian.

But Placidus, who loved his wife and children, asked the crucified God whether he might tell them of his wonderful experience, that they too might believe in Him. And again the Voice answered, bidding him do so, and commanding that after the baptism he should

come once more to the mountain. So Placidus, greatly rejoicing, went to his home, and found that in a vision his wife had also been converted to Christianity. So with her and his two little children he went to Rome. There, with great gladness, the bishop baptized the family, and, according to custom, gave them new names, by which as Christians they were henceforth to be known. Placidus became Eustacius, his wife Theosbyta, and the new names of the two little boys were Theosbytus and Agapetus.

The next day Eustacius went again to the chase and contrived to send the rest of the huntsmen into another part of the forest. No sooner was he alone, than the vision of the cross-crowned stag once more appeared to him, and the Voice spoke to him thus :

‘Eustacius, thou hast become one of My followers, but the devil whom thou hast deserted will rage against thee in many ways. Long will it be before thou comest to the crown of victory, and many trials must thou undergo. Choose, then, whether thou wouldst undergo thy sufferings now, or at the end of life.’

And Eustacius, full of faith, and longing to prove his devotion, begged that his trials might at once beset him. The Voice promised him strength to support them, and presently the vision melted away.

Eustacius went home, and before long troubles such as those which Job endured fell upon him. One misfortune after another overwhelmed him and his family. A pestilence killed his servants, and his sheep, horses, and cattle. Robbers attacked his house and carried off all his possessions, and at last, fearing a plot to murder him and his family, he fled secretly with his wife and children.

When they reached the sea, they were in abject poverty, but Eustacius hoped to find a ship which would take them to another country, and as there was one ready to sail they all went on board.

Now the wife of Eustacius was very beautiful, and when the captain of the ship saw her, he longed to take her away with him as a slave. And presently he devised an evil plan for keeping her with him. As soon as they had crossed the sea and were close to the opposite shore, he demanded from the travellers an enormous sum of money for the passage. Poor as he was, Eustacius had no means of paying, and this the wicked captain knew full well.

‘Cast this man into the sea!’ he cried to the sailors, and Eustacius had only time to clasp his two children in his arms before he was flung overboard. In spite of her tears and entreaties Theosbyta, his beautiful wife, was carried away on board the ship, while her husband with the two boys struggled to shore. Almost in despair and exhausted by his fight for life there was nothing for Eustacius to do but to travel onwards, in hope of finding food and shelter for the children. But it was a wild country he had reached; thick with forests through which ran streams difficult to cross. Presently Eustacius found the way barred by a river too deep to ford in safety with both the little boys. The only possible way of crossing was to leave one child on the bank while he carried the other over the swiftly-rushing river; and then to return for the first boy.

Taking the little Theosbytus in his arms he hurried away with him, and had just put the child in safety on the farther bank, when a cry startled him. Looking round, he saw to his horror a great grey wolf bending

over Agapetus, who in a second was seized and borne off into the forest. Eustacius was maddened by the sight, but before he could reach the opposite bank another shriek reached his ears, and turning, he beheld Theosbytus in the jaws of a lion, which rushed away with him into the open country. Then the distracted father groaned and cried aloud, complaining that his griefs were greater than any that Job endured. He who was once rich and mighty was now destitute and worse than a beggar, since he had lost everything that made life dear: wife, children, home, and friends. Still weeping, with faltering footsteps he came at last to a village, where for the sake of food and shelter he was glad to become a servant in a poor house. For fifteen years he toiled in the village and in the fields as a labourer, while all trace of him was lost by those who had known him in the days of his power and splendour.

But time wore on, and the Emperor of Rome found himself besieged by enemies. In his troubles, many and many a time he lamented the loss of his general Placidus, the finest soldier he had ever known.

‘If Placidus were but in command we should soon end the wars!’ he sighed, and at last he sent soldiers throughout the world to seek him, promising great rewards to those who succeeded in bringing him back to Rome.

Diligently the messengers searched, and finally some of them arrived at the village in which the former commander worked. Eustacius was digging in the fields one day when he recognized in one of these men a soldier who had served under him.

This man presently approached him and asked if anywhere in that district there lived a foreigner called

Placidus? In reply, Eustacius begged them to return to his little house to rest and refresh themselves, and while he waited on them, remembering his former glory and all his lost happiness, he could not keep back his tears. Then one of his guests, after looking at him searchingly, said to his companion, 'Does not this man greatly resemble our old commander Placidus?'

Before the other could reply, both men noticed the scar of a sword-cut which, as they well remembered, the general had received in battle, and they sprang up and embraced him.

'The emperor has need of you!' they cried. 'We have orders to clothe you richly and to bring you into his presence.'

And to the amazement of the villagers the poor labourer was presently arrayed in sumptuous robes, and with the soldiers as escort started on his journey to Rome.

There the emperor and all the people received him with acclamations and shouts of triumph. All his former offices were restored to him, and he was entrusted with absolute command in the war. At once, with the greatest energy, Eustacius set about collecting fresh forces and ordering the strongest young men from every country to join the army.

Amongst those who came were two youths to whom Eustacius spoke because he was much impressed by their splendid strength and their charm of manner, and ordered them to be placed in the front ranks of the army. And it chanced that the two young soldiers were lodged in a house whose mistress was a sad but beautiful-looking woman, a stranger in the land. The young men did not know one another, for they had come from different villages, but they soon became friends, and

one day while they sat awaiting orders they began to talk of their past lives.

'I remember my childhood but dimly,' said the elder of the two. 'But I know that my father was a great general, and that misfortunes overtook him. We sailed in a big ship, and on this ship, why I know not, my mother remained, while my father, my little brother, and I, reached land and walked for weary miles. Then we came to a river, and leaving my brother on the bank, my father bore me across, and was returning for him, when a lion snatched me in his jaws, and carried me into the open country. Mercifully, shepherds with their dogs rescued me unhurt, and brought me up amongst them.' He was going to say more, when his companion sprang to his feet, exclaiming, 'You are my brother! There can be no mistake, for though I was too young to remember it, the labourers who brought me up have often told me how they saved me from a wolf, while at the same moment another child was carried off by a lion and, as they thought, devoured!'

Meanwhile, the lady of the house, who had been sitting in the garden close to the open window at which the two youths were talking, rose up, and went to beg an audience of the commander of the forces.

She was presently admitted, and when she stood before him, she began thus to plead:

'Sir, I beg you to send me to my own country. I am a Roman woman, and a stranger here, and I long to see my own land before I die.'

But all at once she paused, and her voice faltered. While she spoke she had been gazing earnestly on the face of the general, and before he could answer her, suddenly she fell at his feet.

‘My lord,’ she said, ‘were you not once *Placidus*? I am the wife of Placidus, who was afterwards called Eustacius because he had embraced the faith of Christ. I escaped from the evil man who would have made me a slave, and long have I lived here in poverty. I had two sons, Agapetus and Theosbytus.’

Then Eustacius, scarcely able to speak for joy, recognized and embraced his wife, and when they were a little calmer she said to him:

‘My lord, where are our children?’

‘Alas!’ he replied, ‘our boys are long since dead.’ And with tears he told her all that had befallen.

‘Now give thanks unto the Lord!’ she exclaimed, ‘for our children are alive and well!’ And she related to her husband the conversation she had just overheard. ‘Send for the two boys, and they will prove to you that we have indeed found our children!’ she exclaimed.

So the family was once more reunited, and the whole army shared in the joy of its general. A great victory over the enemies of Rome followed, and Eustacius was further honoured and praised by the emperor, and for some time enjoyed every earthly happiness. He and his sons fought for their country far from Rome, and valiant were their deeds. At last, when the war was over, Eustacius returned with his family to the city, and was received with a great display of splendour by the new emperor. For by this time Trajan was dead, and his successor ruled. All went well till the emperor appointed a day for worship and thanksgiving in the temples of the heathen gods, and Eustacius was commanded to offer sacrifices before them.

But the general replied, ‘My lord, I worship the God of the Christians, and Him only do I serve.’

Greatly enraged, the emperor continued to insist that Eustacius should appear and make sacrifices in the temples in honour of his victories. And when the general was firm in refusing, he ordered him with his whole family to be torn to pieces by a fierce lion. But, to the amazement of all the crowd that filled the open-air theatre to watch the terrible scene, the lion not only refused to touch the Christians, but bowed his head in reverence before them. Then the ungrateful emperor devised another and even more cruel death for the family to whom he owed so much. They were cast into a great furnace. Yet though, when the furnace was opened, Eustacius, his wife, and his two brave sons were dead, it was manifest that the fire had not touched them, for they lay peacefully as though they slept. So at last, after his earthly victory, Eustacius gained that heavenly crown which years before the Voice in his forest-vision had promised him.

THE SEVEN SLEEPERS

In the thirteenth century, when Edward I was king, the Archbishop of Genoa, Jacobus de Voragine, collected all the legends of the saints, as well as all the Bible history that had then been written, and made a book called *The Golden Legend*. For the lives of the saints he searched amongst old manuscripts, and listened to traditions that had been handed down from father to son, and were still in his day recounted. The book was written in Latin, but so popular did it become that it was again and again translated into most of the languages of Europe, and in the reign of Edward IV Caxton the printer put it into English. 'The Seven Sleepers' is one of the stories from this *Golden Legend*.

Long ago, in Asia Minor, all white and shining under the blue sky there was a wonderful city called Ephesus. And of all its buildings, the chief was a great and splendid temple of marble, in which the people worshipped the goddess Diana.

For hundreds of years before the birth of Christ it had stood there, and when St. Paul was living in Ephesus, he often passed its great pillared entrance and saw the worshippers go in and out of the temple.

We are told in the Bible how once angry crowds in the city complained that St. Paul was teaching people to worship Diana no longer, but, instead, to adore the name of Jesus Christ. So furious and excited was the crowd that on a certain day, for two hours, men ran about the city keeping up the cry, '*Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*' They would have killed St. Paul, but he escaped from

their hands and lived to continue preaching the new faith of Christianity.

After his death, though most of the people remained pagans, still worshipping Diana and other gods and goddesses, there were also many Christians in Ephesus. At last the Emperor Decius came to the city. He came to compel them to abandon their worship of Christ, and to sacrifice in the temples. So great and terrible was his persecution of those who held the new faith that many of them in terror forsook their religion, bowed down before the statues of the gods, and even betrayed their own kinsfolk. But in Ephesus there lived seven young men who were friends and Christians. Their names were Maximian, Malchus, Marcianus, Denis, John, Serapion, and Constantine. They were well known for their good lives, for their care of the poor, and for the earnestness with which they preached in the name of Christ. No wonder, then, that in their anxiety to please the emperor, there should be many people willing to denounce them.

Now when Decius heard their names, he commanded the young men to be brought before him, and warned them that if before his next visit to the city they had not worshipped in the temple of Diana, they would be put to death. So the friends were in great trouble. They consulted together, and at last agreed to leave the city, and hide themselves in a cave on the mountain of Celion, a few miles distant. This they did, and every day one of their number, disguising himself as a beggar, went into the city to buy food and to bring all the news he could gather about the fate which threatened them.

One day, when Malchus had gone into Ephesus, he returned in great distress, for the emperor, he heard,

was again in the city and had once more commanded the young men to be brought before him.

But the friends were brave, and not one of them thought of denying his faith. 'Let us eat and drink,' they said, 'that we may be better able to bear the tortures that will be laid upon us.' For they knew that their hiding-place must soon be discovered, and that they would be cruelly put to death.

So they ate and drank, and after they had prayed they fell asleep. When they awoke the sun was shining into the cave, and they remembered their danger. Nevertheless, it was necessary to have food, and therefore, clothed as a beggar, Malchus made ready to go again into the city. Bidding his friends farewell and commending them to God, he set out on his dangerous journey.

Now as he left the cave he noticed at some little distance a number of workmen breaking big stones that lay scattered upon the mountain-side. They stared at him, but Malchus was so engrossed in anxious thought that he did not reflect how strange it was to see men in that desolate spot; nor did he wonder how the stones upon which they were working had come there. He blessed the labourers and passed on down the steep mountain path.

Before long, at a bend in the road, one of the city gates came into view. Malchus rubbed his eyes, for upon it, bright in the morning sun, he saw a glittering cross! Full of wonder, and thinking that his senses had deceived him, he hurried to the next gate, and there also, clear against the sky, was the sign he knew and loved. In amazement he walked on, but every gate he passed was surmounted by a cross, and at last, as though

in a dream, Malchus entered the city. Even then the dream-feeling did not leave him, for the familiar streets seemed altered; there were new buildings, the dress of the people was different, and everywhere, at the corners of the way and in the market-place, he saw the sign of the cross.

'This is not Ephesus!' he thought, and trembling asked the name of the city. 'It is Ephesus,' said the passers-by, turning to stare at Malchus, who, remembering his waiting friends, now hastened to the market-place to buy bread. And as he waited to be served, he heard constantly on the lips of the people the name of Jesus Christ.

• 'What is this?' he thought, more than ever bewildered. 'Only yesterday to speak of Jesus Christ meant death. And now His name is on every tongue!'

Then, when he offered his money, the men at the stall turned it over and looked at it strangely, glancing at one another.

'This man has found an ancient treasure!' they exclaimed.

'Where did you get this coin?' they demanded. 'It is not of our time. It belongs to an old emperor. Tell us where you found it, and we will share the treasure with you, and keep our own counsel.'

Full of perplexity and terror Malchus begged them to keep the money and the bread as well, for he feared that he would presently be betrayed to the Emperor Decius. And just as he had suspected, the men at last surrounded him, threw a cord round his neck, and began to drag him through the streets. Far and wide spread the report that a young man had found ancient treasure which he refused to restore, and crowds followed

Malchus and his captors. Finally he was led before two commanding-looking men who began to question him.

‘To what city do you belong?’ they asked.

‘To Ephesus,’ he replied in a dazed voice.

‘Who are your kindred?’

Malchus named them, and people looked at one another, for no such men were known in the city.

‘Whence came this money?’ inquired one of the judges.

‘From my friends who gave it to me this morning to buy bread,’ returned Malchus, scarcely able to speak for bewilderment.

‘But this coin is three hundred and seventy-two years old!’ exclaimed the judge. ‘It was made in the early years of the Emperor Decius.’

‘And is the emperor not in the city?’ faltered the young man.

‘The Emperor Decius? He has been dead hundreds of years!’

At last, knowing that they thought him mad, Malchus fell on his knees and begged the judges to follow him to the cave on Mount Celion, where they would find his friends. They could witness, he said, that he told the truth, and that they had fled from the persecution of the Emperor Decius, who only yesterday had ordered them to appear before him.

Then the judges, one of whom was St. Martin the bishop of Ephesus, and the other Antipater the consul, exchanged glances, for they suspected that a marvellous thing had happened. They, as well as all the other people in Ephesus, had read of the persecutions in early days, when there were only a few Christians in the city.

They had read how the Emperor Decius, having discovered the hiding-place of the seven friends Maximian, Malchus, Marcianus, Denis, John, Serapion, and Constantine, had caused the mouth of their cave to be blocked up so that in a living tomb the young men should die of hunger. But that had happened three hundred and seventy-two years ago! And here before them was a young man, calling himself Malchus, and declaring that he had only just left his companions!

Full of wonder, the bishop and the consul prepared to go with Malchus, and as they climbed the mountain slope, a great crowd following, the bishop's mind was busy. For all sorts of disputes had arisen in the Christian Church, and there were many who refused to believe that the body could rise again from the grave. This denial of the Resurrection from the dead had so grieved and disturbed the Christian emperor who was now reigning, that he had clad himself in sackcloth, and was leading a life of prayer and fasting. Never could he be happy again, as the bishop St. Martin well knew, till all Christians believed once more in the Resurrection. And as he walked in the sunshine, following the young man whose words had so disturbed him, the bishop wondered whether the prayers of the Emperor Theodosius had been heard? Had God worked a miracle to prove to doubting Christians the great truth which they despised?

Meanwhile, the people in the crowd were talking excitedly together. They knew that as long as they could remember the cave on Mount Celion had been blocked up. But recently one of the citizens of Ephesus had determined to make a stable on the mountain-side for his cattle, and there were some who said that in

mistake the workmen had broken down the stones in front of the cavern.

But by this time the place was reached, and Malchus went on ahead and was lost to sight in the darkness of the cave. Then the bishop entered, and between the crumbling stones on the threshold caught the gleam of two silver seals fastening a document on parchment. He broke the seals, and to all the amazed and silent people, read a letter written three hundred and seventy-two years before that day by Christians who had secretly placed it there. It contained an account of the martyrdom of the seven young men, and explained how by the cruel orders of Decius, they had been walled up alive to perish in the mountain cave.

Full of awe the people entered, and there, beautiful as fair blossoming roses, they saw the faces of the Seven Sleepers.

To them three hundred years and more had seemed as one night. Yet while they slept, and the days and months and years rolled on, Ephesus had become a Christian city, and a Christian emperor now ruled the land.

Joyfully, then, the bishop sent to the Emperor Theodosius, begging him to come and behold 'the marvels of the Lord'. And the emperor, who was at Constantinople, journeyed to Ephesus, and, escorted by the bishop and the people, went to the cave. There he saw and embraced the shining and glorious saints, saying, 'I see you now even as I should see our Lord raising Lazarus.' And he praised God that He had wrought this miracle to prove to doubting Christians the truth of the Resurrection.

Then the Seven Sleepers also praised God, and after-

wards, bowing their foreheads to the earth, they gave up their spirits to Christ. ❶

The emperor wept, and kissed them, and commanded that for each of the seven saints should be made a costly tomb of gold and silver. But the same night the friends appeared to him in a vision and begged him to leave their bodies in the cave where they lay. So their tomb, enriched with gold and precious stones, was sealed up once more, and there, still young and beautiful, still waiting till for the second time their eyes open, at the Great Resurrection, lie the Seven Sleepers.

SOME PAGES FROM THE HISTORY OF REYNARD THE FOX

The story of Reynard—the Beast Epic, as it is called—was translated from the Flemish by Caxton the printer in the reign of Edward IV. But long before it was told in Flemish it was known in Germany; and the Germans got it originally from the Fables of Aesop.

It happened once in the early summer days, when the woods were green and the birds sang from dawn to dusk, that the Lion, the King of Beasts, held open court in the forest, and summoned all his subjects, both great and small, to appear before him.

Only one animal failed to obey his command, and he was Reynard the Fox, for well he knew that his life had been evil, so he was sore afraid.

And he did well to fear, for one after the other the beasts pressed forward to complain to the King of the wicked doings of Reynard, the slyest, the most mischievous, and the worst of all his subjects.

Isegrim the Wolf was the first to stand before the King, with many of his kinsmen to support him.

‘High and Mighty Prince, my Lord the King,’ said he, ‘I beseech you that through your great might, right, and mercy, you will have pity on the great trespass that Reynard the Fox has done to me and to my wife.’ He then went on to relate how the Fox had very rudely entered his dwelling without Dame Isegrim’s consent, and had so ill-treated his children that they had become blind.

After the Wolf, came a little hound called Courtoys, who shivered and whined, and complained that in the winter, when food was difficult to obtain and he had just chanced to find a delicious meat-pudding, Reynard had privily come up and had snatched it away from him. But almost before the little dog had finished speaking, Tybert the Cat sprang with soft paws before the King, and declared that the pudding was his. 'I won it by night, in a mill, while the miller slept,' he said. 'Certainly Reynard devoured it, but it was *my* pudding!'

'Let me tell my Lord the King what I saw him do but yesterday to Cuwart the Hare!' exclaimed the Panther. 'He promised to teach the Hare to say his prayers, and while Cuwart was trying to learn them, on a sudden he seized him by the throat, and if I had not come up, it would have gone ill with him.'

But now Grymbart the Badger, who was nephew to Reynard, pushed forward, and, as the Fox's relation, tried to shield and excuse him. Unfortunately for his defence, he was interrupted by the sound of loud sobbing, and coming down a hill towards the woodland court all the assembled beasts beheld a melancholy procession.

On either side of a bier walked two beautiful hens, each carrying a lighted taper. And on the bier a third lovely hen lay dead. Chanticleer the Cock walked before his dead child, piteously wringing his claws and clapping his wings, while his two daughters, whose names were Cautart and Crayant, cried, 'Alas! and a-wellaway, for our dear sister Coppen!'

The cackling and weeping hens stopped before the King's throne, and Chanticleer thus told his story.

'Merciful Lord the King,' he said, 'at the beginning of April I had eight fair sons and seven fair daughters

hatched by my wife. Reynard the thief envied them greatly, but he durst not molest them because of certain great dogs living in our yard, of whom he was afraid. For a time he went away, and we had peace. Then at last he came to us again, dressed as a hermit. He brought with him a letter signed with the King's seal, in which stood written that the King had made peace through all his realm, and that no beasts should henceforth harm one another. "As for me," false Reynard said, "have no more fear, Sir Chanticleer, for I have repented of my sins, and as penance for them I will eat no more flesh to my life's end." He showed me his hair shirt and his pilgrim's shoes, and declared that he was now so old that he thought only of his soul. And so he went away and lay down under a hawthorn bush murmuring his prayers. Then I was glad and merry, and clucking to my children, I told them they had now nothing to fear from the holy Fox. But Reynard, creeping between us and the gate, caught one of my children, and since then, out of fifteen fair sons and daughters I now have but four. Only yesterday my child Coppen was alive, and now she lies on her bier. This complaint I make to you, gracious King. Have pity upon my great and unreasonable damage and loss of my fair children.'

Then the King turned to the Badger and said, 'Sir Grymbart, do you hear this of the uncle you tried to shield? First we will bury this fair hen, the child of Sir Chanticleer, and then we will take counsel how the murderer may be brought to justice.'

So a marble tombstone was laid over Coppen's grave, and on it in great letters was written, '*Coppen, Chanticleer's daughter whom Reynard the Fox hath bitten, lyeth*

hereunder buried, complain ye her, for she is shamefully comen to her death.'

Then the King assembled his councillors to decide on the most trusty messenger to send to Reynard the Fox summoning him to appear without fail at the court. Bruin the Bear was at length chosen, and the King warned him in this manner :

'Sir Bruin, I desire you to take my commands to Reynard. But be prudent, for he is the most crafty of all the beasts, and the greatest liar and hypocrite. Take care, therefore, that he neither deceives nor beguiles you.'

But Bruin replied, 'Good my lord, be easy. If the Fox deceives me, I shall have learnt my business badly.' And he departed merrily. But as the old story relates, 'he came not so merrily again.'

HOW BRUIN THE BEAR FARED AT CASTLE MALEPERDUYS

Bruin had some way to travel before he reached the Fox's dwelling, which was called Castle Maleperduys. It was full of secret passages and winding ways, and the gates were always fast shut.

But the Bear reached the castle at last, and sat down on his tail before the door.

'Reynard, are you at home?' he called. 'The King has sent for you to come and plead your cause at court, and he has sworn that if you do not instantly return with me, you shall be hanged.'

Now the Fox, who was lying in the sun just on the other side of the thick gate, at first made no answer. But presently he came out and greeted Bruin kindly.

‘Dear uncle,’ he said, ‘I heard you a moment ago, but as I was in the midst of my evening prayers I waited a little. How weary you look after this long journey, and how hot you are! Great pity is it that the King has forced this tedious walk upon you, for I had already taken counsel with myself to go to-morrow to the court. I would even go to-day, but I have eaten so much fresh food that I fear it would be pain and grief to walk till I am fully recovered.’

‘What kind of fresh food have you eaten?’ asked Sir Bruin.

‘Oh! simple stuff,’ returned Reynard carelessly. ‘We poor folk have to take what we can come by easily. Honeycombs are plentiful, and when we are hungry we eat them for lack of something better.’

Well the wicked Fox knew that Bruin loved honey better than anything in the world, and with glee he waited for the Bear’s next words.

‘What!’ exclaimed Bruin, ‘you care so little for honey? Only show me where I can find some, and I will be your true and trusty friend at court.’

‘Do you speak truth? I had no thought that you loved it so well,’ replied the Fox, still carelessly. ‘Well, if I may have your friendship in exchange, I can show you where to find enough for a seven years’ feast. A farmer here called Lanfret has honeycombs in plenty.’

The Bear laughed with joy at this news, and willingly followed Reynard to the farmer’s yard, where the trunk of an oak-tree lay ready to be cut up for timber. Two heavy mallets were in the tree to keep the wood apart, and a big hole had been made in the trunk.

‘Now in that tree there lies more honey than you can eat,’ said Reynard. ‘Go to the end and put your

head into that cleft. But be careful, fair uncle, not to eat too much of the honeycomb. It is sweet and good, but enough is as good as a feast, and I should be sad indeed, dear uncle, if it made you ill.'

But Bruin rushed eagerly to the tree, and already he had thrust his head into the cleft in the wood. Then Reynard sprang on to the log and drew out one of the heavy mallets. Immediately the cleft closed, and the Bear was a prisoner. Strive as he might, he could not get his head out of the hole. He scratched with his hind legs, and struggled and cried so loud that Lanfret the farmer heard the noise, and came running from afar. By this time Reynard had moved to a safe distance, and when he saw the farmer coming he called to the Bear tauntingly :

'Is the honey good, fair uncle? Do not, I pray you, eat too much. It might make you ill, and how then could we journey together to the court?' Then, seeing Lanfret and his neighbours rushing towards the prisoner, he betook himself to his castle of Maleperduys.

Meanwhile, men and women with shouts and cries and heavy sticks set upon poor Bruin, who, struggling and kicking, at last managed to get his head free. But his furry ears were torn off, and his paws were hurt so badly that he could scarcely move. Yet with one bound he sprang into the midst of the crowd, and managed to knock an old woman into the river which flowed by the side of the yard. This was good fortune for Bruin, for while all the people ran to the bank to save their neighbour, he plunged into the water and swam down-stream.

In the meantime Reynard, who during the confusion and before taking refuge in his castle had stolen a fat hen from Lanfret's yard, came out to see how his enemy

was faring, and was much vexed to find him alive and swimming away. However, he ran swiftly along the river bank, so that he might have the joy of taunting Bruin when at last he should come out of the water.

'Dear uncle,' he cried, 'you seem to have become a monk since I last saw you, for your head is shaved! Tell me, I pray you, to what order do monks belong when they have their ears, as well as their hair, shorn off? But let me not hinder you, for I perceive that you are on your way to sing evensong.'

The Bear listened in silent rage, for he could find no reply, nor could he even reach the Fox, who stood laughing on the bank of the river. So he swam farther down the stream, and presently dragged himself to the court, where the King swore to revenge his wrongs.

HOW TYBERT THE CAT FARED AS MESSENGER

His second messenger was Tybert the Cat, who went very unwillingly, for he said, 'I am small and weak. If Bruin the Bear could not bring Reynard to court, how shall I hope to succeed?'

But the King answered, 'Though you are small, you are wise. Go, and be not beguiled by the crafty Fox.' So Tybert set out, and when he came to the castle Reynard received him courteously.

'In faith, dear cousin,' he said, 'I will go to the court with you to-morrow with great joy. Rest here to-night, and to-morrow we will set forth together.'

'It were better to go now,' returned the Cat anxiously. 'The moon shines as bright as day. It is a fair night for travelling.'

'Not so,' objected Reynard. 'We might be set upon

and robbed. Stay here, and I will entertain you well.' And then, very carelessly, he began to talk about mice.

'Mice?' repeated Tybert. 'Are there mice to be had?'

'Do you love them so well?' asked Reynard in pretended surprise.

'They are more delicious than custard tarts or the best pasties,' declared Tybert, 'and if you can only show me where they dwell, I am ready to be your friend, whatever befalls.'

'Oh! if that is your will, I know of a barn where they abound,' said Reynard. 'It belongs to the priest. Let us go at once, and you may eat as many as you desire.'

Now the previous night Reynard had stolen a fat hen, and he knew that the priest had set a trap for him. So when they came to the hole in which the trap was set, he said, 'Now, fair cousin, make haste and creep within. There are good stores of mice within. Listen! Do you not hear how they squeak together? But be speedy, for my wife waits for us.'

'Do you really counsel me to go into that hole?' asked the Cat doubtfully. 'These priests are full of guile, one never knows what snares they may spread.'

'Is the bold Sir Tybert afraid?' jeered the Fox. 'What ails you, fair cousin?'

Tybert was ashamed to be thought a coward, and he sprang into the hole, and was immediately caught by the neck.

Piteously he mewed and struggled, while Reynard stood by and laughed.

'Are they fat mice?' he inquired. 'But what a noise you make over them, dear cousin! Is it the fashion at court to sing in such fashion while you eat?'

But by this time the mewling and screaming of Tybert had aroused the priest, who cried out, 'The Fox has been caught! He lies in the trap! Cofne, all of you, and render help.' And every one in the house, thinking that a fox was their prisoner, beat the poor Cat till he was stiff and sore, and when at last he managed to struggle free of the trap he was as badly wounded as Bruin had been. In this sad plight he returned to the court, and when the King heard his complaint he sent Grymbart the Badger to Castle Maleperduys.

Now by this time, Reynard thought it wiser to play no tricks on the Badger, but to follow him to court as the King commanded. For Sir Grymbart brought the news that if in three days Reynard did not appear for judgement, his castle would be set on fire, and, as he was well aware, he and his wife Dame Ermelyn, and all his children, must be burnt to death.

But in his heart he did not despair. He knew that though he was wicked and crafty he had more brains than all the other simple beasts put together, and he trusted to his cleverness to save him. So he bade farewell to his wife, and commended to her his children.

'Take special care of Reynkin,' he said, 'for he promises well, and even Rossel is a passing fair thief. I love them both dearly, and they will do me credit.'

Then, leaving Dame Ermelyn lamenting, he went his way with Sir Grymbart the Badger towards the court.

Many were his later adventures, but in spite of all his enemies he came to great honour, and returned at last to Castle Maleperduys a powerful and triumphant ruler. For as he said, 'Always the Fox shall abide the Fox.' And in worldly affairs, at least, it is brains that count.

THE COURTEOUS MERCHANT OF PAVIA

The history of the Merchant of Pavia comes from an Italian book of prose romances called *The Decameron*. Its author was Boccaccio, a great writer, who lived in the fourteenth century at the time when our poet Chaucer was writing in England. Chaucer made use of some of Boccaccio's stories, as in later years did Shakespeare, Spenser, and many other poets and dramatists.

At the time when the great Prince Saladin ruled Babylon, all the nations of Europe joined in a crusade for the recovery of the Holy Land. Saladin was their foe, but never was a foe braver, more courteous, and more full of chivalry than this Eastern monarch.

Some time before the war actually began, Saladin, who knew of the preparations that were being made for it all over Europe, determined to judge for himself the strength of the forces he must shortly meet. To all his subjects, therefore, he caused it to be proclaimed that he had set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca, the birth-place of the prophet Mahomet. In reality, disguised as a merchant, in company with two of his wisest advisers and a few servants, he travelled in Europe. Passing from one country to another, he discovered the number of ships that were being built, and the strength of the armies already collected in each land. At last he came to Italy, and as he rode between Milan and Pavia one day, it grew so late that he and his friends began to despair of a lodging, since the city seemed yet far off. While they deliberated, they met a gentleman riding with his servants, and hunting with hawks and hounds.

To him Saladin sent a servant to inquire whether it would be possible to reach Pavia before the closing of the gates, and the gentleman, who was a merchant of Pavia, himself rode forward to answer the question.

'Sir,' said he, 'you cannot reach the city before nightfall. But my servants shall guide you to a house where you may be well lodged.'

'Many grateful thanks,' returned Saladin. 'For we are merchants, and strangers in this land.' And accepting Messer Torello's man as an escort, he and his company rode away.

Meanwhile, Torello had secretly given orders to the serving-man to conduct the travellers to his own country house, and he, taking a much nearer way, arrived before them, and commanded tables laden with choice food to be spread in the garden.

By the time his guests arrived everything was in readiness for them, and Saladin was much pleased and touched at the delicate courtesy of his new acquaintance. He and his fellow travellers were taken to beautiful rooms, where they rested and were refreshed with wine; and later they supped with their host in the garden. Meanwhile, unknown to Saladin, Messer Torello had sent a messenger to his town house in Pavia with a letter to his wife, bidding her prepare to receive guests on the morrow, and worthily to entertain them.

Till late at night the newly-made friends talked together. Torello thought that never had he met nobler and more distinguished men than these merchants who came, they said, from Cyprus; and Saladin was equally delighted with his host, the merchant of Pavia.

On the morrow when they rose, they spent more time together, for Torello rode out with them and they

'hunted with his hounds and falcons. But when Saladin begged his host to tell them of the best hostelry in Pavia, to which city they must now betake themselves, Torello said he would ride with them to show them the way. Late in the evening they came to Pavia, and to Saladin's immense surprise their friend led them to his own house, where fifty citizens were ready to receive them and to do them honour. After a splendid banquet, Messer Torello sent for his wife to present her to his guests, and Saladin and his ministers were amazed at her beauty and at the beauty of the two little sons who followed her.

Adalieta was as gracious as she was lovely, and after some exchange of courtesies she begged her husband's guests to accept a gift from her. Servants were then sent to fetch costly robes made in the Persian fashion. For each of the travellers there were two robes; one lined with cloth of gold, the other with rich fur. To each of them also she presented an under-garment, or tunic, of carnation satin embroidered with gold and pearls and lined with white taffeta.

'You are far from your wives,' she said, smiling, 'and they cannot prepare for you the kind of robes which merchants love to wear. Therefore, I pray you, accept these simple gifts.'

By this time Saladin was almost persuaded that Messer Torello had discovered the true rank of his guests. Yet as the hours went on he felt assured that this was not the case, and that all the merchant's courtesy sprang from simple kindness of heart towards strangers in his country.

The next morning he found fresh horses richly arrayed, replacing the tired beasts that he and his servants had

ridden, and a great company of citizens on horseback ready to accompany him and his ministers some miles on the journey. And when at last he parted from his host Saladin exclaimed, 'By our greatest gods, I never met with any man more complete in all noble perfections, more courteous and kind than Torello is!'

On his side, Messer Torello returned to his house marvelling at the noble bearing and the courtesy of these merchants from Cyprus, whom he never expected to see again.

Time went on, and at last the Crusade was proclaimed, and Torello, amongst thousands of other Italian citizens, determined to join it and to fight against the infidels. But before he set out he spoke to his wife in this fashion:

'Dear heart, thou art young and beautiful and rich. If I should never return to thee again, many suitors will assail thee. Moreover thy kinsmen will urge thee to marry. I charge thee, then, that if before a year, a month, and a day thou hast not heard from me nor have I returned to thee, to marry again. For in that case I shall be dead, and it will be for thy welfare to choose a husband.'

In vain Adalieta wept and protested. Torello would not depart without her promise, for he knew that life would be difficult for her if he died and she should remain unmarried.

So she pledged herself at last, and embracing her lord, gave him a ring.

'If I should chance to die before your home-coming,' she said, 'remember me when you look on this.'

And Messer Torello took the ring and rode away to begin his journey.

At Genoa he and his friends took ship to sail to Acre, where they joined the rest of the Christian army. There a terrible disease broke out amongst the troops, and without a blow being struck on either side, almost all the soldiers who escaped death were made prisoners by Saladin.

Torello was one of them, and he was taken to Alexandria, the head-quarters of Saladin during the war. Here, knowing as he did much about hunting and hawking, he was thought to be a falconer, and Saladin, hearing that he was skilled in sport, ordered his release and made him keeper of the birds.

Now neither Saladin nor Torello recognized one another. For the Soldan, as he was called, had been disguised when he came to Pavia, and Torello was much changed by illness and by his falconer's livery. The months were passing, and Torello began to be very anxious about his wife, for he feared the time he had assigned for her re-marriage would be over before he could let her know that he lived. At last, secretly, he managed to send a letter to his uncle, the Abbot of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro, a church in Pavia, telling him all that had chanced. This letter he gave to certain ambassadors who were returning to Genoa and knew the abbot as a great and important man.

Feeling happier now that he was assured his wife would receive news from him, Torello began to look more like his old self, and one day, when Saladin was talking to him about the hawks, he smiled in such a way as to arrest the Soldan's attention.

'Who was it', he wondered, 'who had smiled like that?' And all at once he remembered the kind Italian merchant! But without betraying himself, he said suddenly :-

'Tell me, Christian, of what country thou art?'

'Sir,' answered Torello, 'I am a Lombard, of a city called Pavia.'

The answer made Saladin almost certain that the falconer was none other than his generous host; yet he wished to prove it beyond shadow of doubt. Taking him into the palace, he caused all his garments to be laid out before the Christian.

'Look well upon these robes,' he said, 'and tell me whether thou rememberest to have seen any of them before.'

'Sir,' returned Torello, touching two of the vestments, 'these resemble gowns given by my wife to three merchants who once stayed in my poor house.'

Then Saladin took him in his arms with great joy.

'Dost thou not know me?' he cried. 'I was one of those three merchants whom you royally entertained! And now you shall be lord here, for the gods have sent you to me.'

Amazed and overwhelmed to find that in the guise of a simple merchant he had met and sheltered the great monarch of the East, Torello found himself clothed in royal garments and honoured and praised by all the greatest lords in the palace. And for some time his wonderful new life made him forget how the weeks were passing. Yet when he thought of his wife he remembered that she had news of him, and he imagined all was well.

But unknown to him it chanced that in the army captured by Saladin there was another Messer Torello, who, dying of the plague, had been buried. All who heard of the death of this gentleman thought that it was Torello of Pavia who had perished, and this

news was presently brought home to Adalieta, who, owing to mischance, had never received her husband's letter.

No sooner had tidings of the merchant's death spread abroad in Pavia than suitors began to besiege the house of Adalieta. Sorrowing, and in floods of tears, she told her kinsmen, who urged her to choose amongst them, that even though Torello's death was assured, her vow did not bind her to marry until a year, a month, and a day had elapsed from the hour of her husband's departure. There was still time before her, and by no persuasion would she be induced to marry till every moment of her respite was over.

• All that her brethren could do, therefore, was to make her choose from amongst the lovers one whom, after the arranged lapse of time, she would take as her husband.

Now in Alexandria it chanced one day that Torello saw one of the sailors whom he remembered as a friend of the man to whom he had entrusted his letter to the abbot. Sending for him, he questioned him, and discovered to his horror that the ship had sunk on the voyage to Genoa, and his messenger, with nearly all the crew, had been drowned.

By now the time he had assigned was almost over, and his dear wife, true to her vow, would soon be married to another! Overcome with grief and misery at the thought, Torello fell ill. He refused to eat; sleep forsook him; and when Saladin hastened to his side it was some time before he could whisper the whole story.

After reproaching him for keeping the matter secret so long, the Soldan began to comfort him.

'Fear not,' he said. 'Thou shalt be in Pavia before the fatal day, if thou wilt trust in me.'

'Alas! great Saladin, to-morrow is the last day of all,' he sighed; 'and true to her vow, my wife will wed. How can I reach her in time, seeing the length of the journey?'

But Saladin, bidding him once again trust his word, went forth and commanded that a rich and splendid bed should be prepared in the great hall of the palace. Its mattress was of velvet and cloth of gold. The quilt and hangings were embroidered with orient pearls and precious stones, and two silken pillows were laid upon it.

When evening was come, the Soldan wrapped Torello in one of his own costly Saracen robes, and leading him to the bed, invited him to lie upon it since he was still weak and in need of rest. Then embracing him and kissing his forehead, he said, 'All my gods go with you, and guard you from any peril.'

So, weeping, he turned away and left the hall, while there entered a physician bearing a cup, and with him a man unknown to Torello.

The physician put the cup into the merchant's hand.

'Drink this,' he said. 'It is a sleeping potion, and will strengthen you after your weakness.' And Torello, obeying, sank into a deep sleep.

Then Saladin, once more entering, laid on the bed a flashing crown, upon which was an inscription to Adalieta, the wife of Torello. Next he placed on the sleeping man's finger a wonderful ring which glowed like a torch. In his hand he laid a splendid sword, and on the pillow a jewel fit for a king's ransom. At the bedside he set also two great basins of gold filled with ducats, with ropes of pearl and other gems. Then kissing his friend once more, he called to the unknown man, bidding him dispatch. The man was a magician, and

in a moment, before the eyes of the Soldan and his court, the gleaming bed with Torello sleeping upon it disappeared, and was set down, thousands of miles away, before the high altar of San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro at Pavia!

Now presently, before it was light, and when the bells began to ring for matins, a monk bearing a torch entered the church, and, beholding the sparkling bed in front of the altar, rushed in mad fear towards the cloisters. There he was met by the abbot and a procession of monks coming to morning prayer.

'What!' cried the abbot, 'you, a monk, to feel terror in our holy church where no evil spirit has power to walk? Return with us, and we will see the cause of your fear.'

Torches were lighted in haste, and the priests crowded into the church and beheld the jewel-decked bed and upon it a man asleep.

While they hesitated, for wonder and fear scarcely daring to breathe, Torello gave a deep sigh, awoke, and sat upright.

Then indeed the monks scattered right and left in terror, but Torello, gazing round him, saw that the great Saladin had kept his promise, for he knew that he was in the city of Pavia.

At once he began to call the abbot by name. 'I am Torello, thy nephew!' he cried.

But at these words, the abbot, who for months had thought his nephew dead and buried, was even more afraid, and it was long before the merchant could persuade him to approach and listen to his story.

In amazement he gazed at the gifts of the princely Saladin, and only began to collect his wits when Torello questioned him concerning Adalieta.

'This very morning she is to be wed !' he exclaimed. 'And the marriage feast is even now preparing.'

'Now,' cried Torello, 'I would fain see my wife's behaviour at this feast, that I may know whether she has ceased to mourn me.'

So consulting with the abbot, he made the following plan.

'Send word to the bridegroom,' he said, 'that as a kinsman of the bride you desire to come to the feast, and that with you will come an Arabian stranger who is under your protection. By this means, unknown to her, I may see my wife, and judge how she welcomes her new bridegroom.' •

The abbot agreed, and after the gold and rich jewels on the bed had been safely bestowed, Torello, dressed as he was in his long Saracen robe and turban, followed his uncle to the bridegroom's house.

They were graciously received, for the abbot explained that his companion was a rich Saracen, sent by Saladin as an ambassador to the King of France; and when the feast was set at small tables in the dining-hall, Torello was placed at one opposite to the bride, whose face he eagerly scanned.

She was pale and sad, and his heart rejoiced within him, for well he guessed that the marriage was pain and grief to her. •

Very often she glanced at the stranger, but Torello saw that she did not know him. His Eastern robe, the long beard which he wore, and above all, that she believed him dead, made her recognition impossible. About midway in the feast, Messer Torello called to him a young page whose duty it was to wait only on the bride.

'Fair youth,' he said, 'go to your mistress, salute her from me, and tell her that in my land it is the custom for the bride to send the cup from which she drinketh, filled with wine, to the stranger at the feast. He drinks and pledges her, and she then drinks what is left and pledges her guest.'

The page repeated his words to Adalieta, who filled a golden cup with wine, and by the hand of her page sent it to the Saracen. Torello then took a draught which almost emptied the cup, and unseen by any one, dropped into it the ring which on his departure for the Crusade his wife had given him.

The wine scarcely covered the ring, and as the bride, smiling, raised the cup to her lips she saw that it was her own.

Looking earnestly at the stranger while the colour flooded her face, she suddenly sprang up, overthrowing the table, and rushed towards him.

'This is my lord and husband!' she cried. 'This truly is my lord Torello.'

Then there was wonderment, confusion, and joy in the hall, while Torello recounted all that had befallen.

Sorrowfully the new bridegroom granted that Adalieta was true wife to Torello, and the flashing crown sent to her by Saladin was placed upon her head. With such pomp as had never before been seen in Pavia she was led to her old home, from which dwelling-place Torello dispatched a message to the noble Saladin, recounting all his happiness.

So Adalieta and Torello were re-united, and they lived long and happily, showing greater courtesy than ever to all strangers who came to the city of Pavia.

MELUSINE

The story of Melusine was first written by a Frenchman called Jean d'Arras, who lived in the fourteenth century, about the time when Edward III was king and the Hundred Years' War was going on between England and France. It is therefore more than five hundred years old. About a hundred years after it was first written in French it was translated into English, and a copy of the story is in the British Museum. The famous French family of Lusignan in Poitiers traced their descent from the beautiful lady Melusine.

LONG ago, in the beautiful country of France, there lived a certain lord called the Earl of Forest. He had many sons, of whom the bravest, the most handsome, and the cleverest was Raymond. Now it happened that this Raymond once paid a visit to his uncle, the Earl of Poitiers, and so pleased was the earl with his nephew's skill and bravery in the tournaments which were held that he wished in future to bring him up with his own son.

Raymond's father, who was not very rich, consented, and the boy stayed on at his uncle's castle, learning, as he grew to manhood, all his duty as a good knight.

The Earl of Poitiers was a great hunter, and there was nothing he loved better than to chase the wild boar in the forest with Raymond at his side. One day, when a large and fierce boar had tired out the patience of all the barons and knights who were following the hunt, the earl and his nephew were left riding alone. Night fell before they were aware, and as they had lost sight of

the creature they were chasing, they lay down under a tree to wait for daylight.

The sky was full of stars, and the Earl of Poitiers, who, besides being a brave soldier and a great hunter, was also a very learned man, had begun to point out to his nephew the different constellations, when suddenly he paused, and Raymond saw that he was greatly troubled. For some time he did not reply to the young man's questioning, but at last he spoke.

'Fair nephew,' said he, 'these stars do tell of grievous deeds. A certain knight there is who presently will slay his lord. Yet for this deed no vengeance will befall. Nay rather this same knight shall grow rich and mighty, and from him shall rise a family great and noble that shall last while the world endures.'

Now while they were both pondering upon this warning from the sky, they heard a great trampling and crashing in the underwood and the voice of an angry beast. Springing to their feet, they beheld the wild boar rushing straight towards them. Raymond levelled his spear, and met and wounded the animal, who, more than ever enraged, turned upon the earl. Very gallantly the earl fought, but the boar was so huge and so fierce that it was as much as the two men could do to keep him at bay. At last Raymond gave him such a terrible blow that his sword broke, and the point of the blade flew backwards. Then snatching up his spear instead of the now useless weapon, at last he killed the creature. But to his horror, on turning round, he saw that the earl too was dead. The broken blade had lodged in the old man's heart, and it was Raymond who all unwittingly had killed him!

The young man's grief was terrible, for he loved his

uncle, and not for any chance of growing rich and powerful would he have harmed him. For hours he sat by the dead man's side overcome with horror. Then thinking to go to some distant land and do penance for the deed which he had innocently committed, he mounted his horse and slowly rode away.

It was a glorious night, and the moon flooded with silver all the forest glades, but Raymond's mind was so stupefied with grief that he saw nothing of the beauty around him, and not even the wonderful sight which a turn of the path brought into view was able to wake him from his miserable brooding.

By the side of a fountain which rose leaping and bubbling from the earth were three lovely maidens. Their filmy gowns hung about them as a green mist of leaves hangs about a slender tree in spring, and as they played with the water, tossing its bright drops into the air, their arms shone white in the moonlight, and the sound of their sweet laughing voices broke the stillness of the forest.

Raymond's horse started, and swerved aside, but Raymond himself, strangely enough, saw nothing, and it was not till the loveliest of the three sisters had seized his horse's bridle that his eyes were opened as though upon a vision.

The lady who stood beside him was laughing at his amazement, but when Raymond leapt from the saddle and, overcome by her beauty, knelt before her, she grew suddenly grave.

'Raymond,' she said, and the knight started to find she knew his name. 'Well I wot the cause of thy grief. Yet fear not, but trust in me to save thee from harm. Get thee hence now, and return to the castle, where thou

must wait till the brave earl shall be carried home. All men will weep and lament that he hath come by his death in hunting. For from his wounds it would seem that the boar hath killed him. Abide thou always at the castle till the day before the barons pay homage to their new lord, Bertrand, the earl's son. Then come and seek me here by the fountain, where now I speak to thee, and if thou wouldst hear my name, know that I am called Melusine.'

Now every moment Raymond found himself falling more deeply in love with this strange and beautiful lady, whose voice was like murmuring water, and whose eyes were brilliant as green jewels; and before he left her, he had gained her promise to marry him. But the promise was given with one strange condition, to which, greatly bewitched as he was, the young lord agreed.

'You must swear to me,' said the wonderful lady, 'that on Saturdays I shall be free as air. On that day I shall disappear, and you must never seek to find me, nor to make inquiry about me. If you agree, I will be a true and loving wife to you, but if you cannot swear to keep faith with me in this matter, I will never see you more.' And after Raymond had sworn solemnly to obey her wish, she kissed him, and bade him go, while she glided away through the moonlight towards the shadowy forms of her two sisters.

Full of amazement, but greatly comforted, Raymond rode to the castle of Poitiers, where everything happened just as the lady had foretold, and in a short time he returned to the forest fountain, and found Melusine waiting for him. They met with great joy, and Raymond again listened to his lady's counsel.

'To-morrow,' she said, 'the barons will assemble to

do homage to the new earl, and when thy turn shalt come, this favour must thou ask at his hands. As reward for the services thy father has rendered to the Earl of Poitiers, beg for only so much land as the hide of a stag will enclose. This will he freely grant thee. Thou wilt then meet a man who has a stag's hide to sell. Buy it of him for whatever price he asks, and then cut it into strips as narrow as may be, and bring these back to this fountain.'

So Raymond took leave of her, and did just as she commanded. But when he returned to the fountain, lo! he found the trees levelled, and everything prepared for the measuring. In narrow strips as it was, the hide enclosed a great tract of land, and at the point where one end of the strip joined the other end, there suddenly gushed forth a beautiful fountain. This spring, bubbling and dancing, soon formed a river which flowed through the land now belonging to Raymond, and flows there to this day.

And now at last Melusine gave her consent to the marriage, and bade her lover invite to the ceremony the new Earl of Poitiers and his wife, as well as a company of knights and ladies from the castle. She bade him also tell the guests that he was going to wed a king's daughter, but more than that he was not to say. Meanwhile he was to leave all the preparations for the marriage to her.

Great was the wonder at the castle concerning Raymond's mysterious bride, and the Earl Bertrand, his cousin, warned him of the danger he ran in wedding an unknown maiden. But Raymond was loyal in defence of her, and early next day the guests set out from the castle towards the newly won land of the young lord.

Before they reached it a knight and twenty-four horsemen, splendidly dressed, met them, and formed an escort to conduct them to the bride, and the guests had scarcely recovered from their surprise at such a magnificent reception, when they were struck dumb at the sight of other marvels. Gay and beautiful pavilions had risen amongst the trees, as well as tents for the horses and their grooms; and lords, ladies, and servants were splendidly lodged and provided for.

Then having rested awhile, the Countess of Poitiers, the earl, and the other guests were conducted to Melusine's pavilion, where, in a beautiful room, she stood dressed for her bridal.

• So lovely she looked, and so wonderful, that they could only gaze upon her speechlessly.

Her golden hair was wreathed with pearls, her gown of rich brocade was studded with precious stones, but the pearls were not whiter than her curious yet beautiful face, nor were the jewels brighter than her brilliant eyes.

• And so between the two men of highest rank, the Earl of Poitiers and Raymond's father, the Earl of Forest, she passed into the chapel. And here was another wonder! For, like the tents and the pavilions, the chapel seemed to have arisen out of the earth, or to have dropped from the skies. Very marvellous it was, with its fretted roof, its carved images overlaid with gold, its jewelled and embroidered altar-cloths, and illuminated missals. And there Raymond was wedded to the strange lady.

The feasting and rejoicing lasted for several days, but at last all the guests went home, and Raymond was glad to be left alone with his young wife, whom every hour he loved more dearly.

'And now,' said Melusine, 'it is time to build our fair castle!' Almost by magic, as it seemed, that castle arose; for a band of workmen, who came mysteriously, none knew whence, laboured night and day till the fairest castle in the world raised its turrets and balconies and towers above the thickly-wooded land.

Then Melusine and her lord gave a festival to name the wonderful dwelling which had arisen, and the Earl of Poitiers, who was one of their guests, declared that only the beautiful lady who had built it had a right to give it a name. Melusine smiled. 'Then it shall be called *Lusignan*,' she said, 'for that is a form of my own name, which means *marvellous*, or coming from a great marvel.'

All the knights and ladies agreed that the castle could receive no better name, and amid shouts of rejoicing Lusignan it was called, and Lusignan it remains to this day.

Now after the building of the castle, Raymond spent many years of happiness with his lovely wife, and very faithfully he kept his vow to her. Every Saturday, as she had warned him, she went away, but, true to his promise, Raymond asked her no questions, and never tried to follow nor to hinder her from leaving him. The one thing that marred his happiness was that his sons were all in some way different from other people's children, for there was something wild and terrible about most of them. Yet so dearly did he love his wife, who never looked older, nor grew less beautiful, that even this trouble seemed a light one. So the years passed till in an evil hour Raymond invited his brother, now the Earl of Forest, to come and visit him at the marvellous castle of Lusignan. Saturday was the day of his arrival, and he at once began to ask for Melusine, and grew angry with

Raymond for his weakness in allowing her every week to disappear.

‘Know you not, brother,’ he said, ‘that this is common talk in the land? The people blame you, for they say you dare not inquire where your wife goes when she leaves you thus.’

Then for the first time Raymond grew full of anger and suspicion, and brooding over his brother’s words, he at last took a sword, and made his way through passages and galleries of the castle to a door which he knew was there, but through which he had never passed. With the point of the sword he pierced this locked door, and through the chink looked within. This is what he saw.

In a vaulted room, large and lofty, there was a great bath of marble to which steps led. And lying in the water, combing her yellow hair, was his beautiful Melusine. But to his horror, she was changed, for her white and slender body ended in a serpent’s tail!

Full of fear and misery, Raymond crept away, and all night he lay sleepless with grief and horror. Yet in the morning when, just as it was dawn, his wife came to him as lovely as he had always known her, he almost thought he had dreamt an evil dream. Not a word did he say to her of what he now persuaded himself he had imagined, and for some time all went well. But happiness was not to last, for, before long, news reached him of a terrible crime committed by Geoffrey, the cruellest and fiercest of his sons. At first he would not believe that this boy had not only killed his own brother, but with him had burnt a whole abbey full of monks. But the news was only too true, and once more Raymond began to believe that what he had seen in the castle of Lusignan was no

dream, and that his wife was indeed a snake-woman, and an evil sprite. For no human woman, he argued, could have had children like hers.

Filled with wrath he rode back from the smoking abbey to his home, where, surrounded by her gentlewomen, Melusine was waiting for him.

‘Get thou hence, false serpent!’ he exclaimed, white with anger; and at the cruel words Melusine fell fainting to the ground. She knew that there was now no escaping from her terrible fate, and that in her fairy shape, half snake, half woman, she must linger about the world till the Judgement Day. By her marriage with Raymond she had hoped to live no longer than a mortal’s life, and then, buried in the church of Our Lady of Lusignan, she might have become a happy spirit. But now Raymond’s words had killed all these hopes for ever, even though the moment he had uttered them he repented, for he still loved his mysterious snake-lady.

But no sorrow was of avail, for Melusine knew that her fate was sealed. In loving words she told her husband all her secret. She was a king’s daughter truly, but her mother was a fairy, and she had partly inherited this mother’s fairy nature. She must leave Raymond, she said, but always she would watch over him, and according to the promise made years ago by the forest fountain, the family of Lusignan should be great and powerful for ever.

Then with a long, long sigh, Melusine raised herself and went to the window. A moment later she was seen, half woman, half serpent, hovering round the towers and battlements of the castle with bitter cries. And never did she quite forsake her home, for often at night, in her well-known form as a young and beautiful woman, she

appeared to her two youngest children, whom she loved, and cherished, and often her wailing voice was heard about the walls of Lusignan. Raymond lived long after the loss of his wife, but, as the old story tells, 'there was never man that saw him laugh, nor make joy.' And to this day in the country about Poitiers, whenever a sharp and sudden sound is borne on the wind, the peasants say, 'Listen ! It is the cry of Melusine.'

AUCASSIN AND NICOLETTE

Aucassin and Nicolette is a very old story. It was probably first written down in Old French at the end of the twelfth century, about the time when Richard I was king of England. But the tale itself is much older, and most likely comes from an Eastern land. The writer who first put it into French tells the story partly in prose and partly in verse. In Arabia stories were often told in this fashion, and the verses were sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Perhaps, therefore, some Frenchman who had been on Crusade, heard the story told in the East, and afterwards, keeping the same form, put it into his own language. Though we cannot be sure about this, it is quite certain that very many Eastern stories found their way into our literature and into all the literatures of Europe after the Crusades. For these wars took men of Western nations to the East, brought them into contact with Eastern races, and taught them something of Eastern faiths, Eastern customs, and Eastern literature.

Aucassin and Nicolette was not put into modern French till the eighteenth century, and, till thirty or forty years ago, very few people in England knew anything about it. This version of the story is taken from Mr. Bourdillon's translation.

ONCE upon a time there was a rich and powerful lord of France called Warren, Count of Beaucaire. He had wide lands and rich cities, and many brave knights owned his sway. But he had a bitter enemy in a certain Count of Valence, who made war upon him, besieged his cities, laid waste his wide lands, and killed many of his followers. Now the Count of Beaucaire had only one child, a boy called Aucassin, and a prettier boy was never seen. His golden hair hung in a tangle of little curls, and his eyes

were blue as the summer sky. But pretty as he was, and young as he was, he knew well how to ride and how to fight, and a finer soldier than Aucassin never lived. Yet in spite of his bravery, and in spite of the evil deeds of his father's enemy, this young lord for a certain reason refused to be made a knight, refused to go into battle, and neglected all his duties as a son and a soldier. The reason was this. In the land of Beaucaire there lived a very beautiful maid. As a child she had been a slave, led into the country by a company of heathen. The Viscount of Beaucaire, struck by her loveliness, had bought her from these men, and taken her himself to a church, where at the font, with the viscount for godfather, she was christened Nicolette. When she had grown into a slim maiden, Aucassin saw her, and seeing her, fell so deeply in love that he was determined to marry no one else in the wide world.

In vain his father insisted that such a thing could not be. How, he urged, could the future lord of Beaucaire marry a slave girl, a captive from a foreign land? If his son wanted a wife, there were kings' daughters who would gladly marry him; or if he preferred it, he might choose from the richest and loveliest ladies of his own country. But Aucassin gave no heed.

'Father,' he said, 'to what purpose is this oration? Never God give me aught that I ask of Him, if I take knighthood or mount horse, if I face fight or battle-field, to smite warrior or to be myself smitten, if you give me not Nicolette, my sweet friend whom I love so well.'

Then, much enraged, Warren, Count of Beaucaire, went to the viscount and said, 'Sir Viscount, come, rid me of Nicolette your god-daughter!' And this lord, who

was one of the count's vassals and loath to offend him, made haste to answer that he would send the girl out of the country to a land unknown to Aucassin, who should never see her more.

But instead of sending her quite away, the viscount took her secretly to one of his palaces, where, in a little room in a tower overlooking the garden, he shut her up with only an old woman to bear her company. And here, in the midst of the story, comes a verse which describes the grief of Nicolette :

Nicolette is prisoner
In a vaulted bed-chamber,
Strange of pattern and design,
Richly painted, rarely fine.
At the window-sill of stone
Leaned the maiden, sad and lone.
Yellow was her shining hair,
And her eyebrow pencilled rare,
Face fine-curved and colour fair :
Never saw you lovelier.
Gazed she o'er the garden ground,
Saw the opening roses round,
Heard the birds sing merrily ;
Then she made her orphan cry,
' Woe 's me ! what a wretch am I !
Caged and captive, why, ah, why ?
Aucassin, young lord, prithee,
Your sweetheart, am I not she ?
Ay, methinks you hate not me.
For your sake I'm prisoner,
In this vaulted bed-chamber,
Where my life 's a weary one.
Long herein I will not stay,
Can I find way ! '

Now when Aucassin found that his beautiful sweetheart had disappeared, he was full of sorrow and anger.

In vain he went to the viscount and demanded news of her. In vain he besought his father to yield.

Meanwhile the Count of Valence continued the war, and before long made a furious assault upon the castle of Beaucaire. But Aucassin, remaining obstinate, refused to take any part in its defence.

Then his father made a last appeal to him, urging him at least to show himself amongst the soldiers—'For,' he said, 'if they but see thee among them, they will make a better fight for their lives and their havings, and for thy land and mine. So tall art thou, and so strong, 'tis no great thing to do; and it is thy devoir.'

And at last Aucassin replied, 'I will make a covenant with thee.'

'Aye, and what covenant, fair son?' said the Count of Beaucaire.

'I will take arms and go to the fighting,' returned Aucassin, 'and, if God spare my life, you shall let me see Nicolette, my sweet friend, and speak two words to her or three, and once only kiss her.' And to this his father agreed.

Then Aucassin buckled on his armour and sprang to his horse, and so tall and strong yet slight he was, that with his yellow hair and his blue eyes he looked like a prince from fairy-land; and galloping fiercely from the castle gates, he spurred his horse into the thick of the battle. Only one thought was in his mind, that of seeing Nicolette, his sweet friend, once more. So he rode, heedless of danger, till he found himself hemmed in, and heard the shouts of his enemies who had taken him prisoner.

Not till then did Aucassin wake from his dreams, and then he woke to good purpose. Slashing right and left

amongst his foes, he wounded seven of them, and with his gleaming sword in his hand forced a passage for himself and rode full tilt out of the fray. And then by good luck he came face to face with the Count of Valence himself, who, hearing the news of Aucassin's capture, had ridden up to see the son of his enemy put to death. But with one crashing blow Aucassin smote him on the helmet so that he fell to the ground stunned, and when he was at length able to rise, the boy led him in triumph to his father, the Count of Beaucaire.

'Fair son,' said his father, greatly pleased, 'well were it you should do deeds like this, and not gape at folly!'

'Father,' said Aucassin, 'read me no lectures, but keep me my covenant.'

'Bah! What covenant, fair son?' asked his father angrily, feigning to have forgotten the promise he had given.

Aucassin, enraged at this treachery, turned to his prisoner, the Count of Valence, and offered to let him go in safety, if he would give him one pledge. And the Count, knowing that he was in Aucassin's power, at once agreed. Then said Aucassin, 'Give me your word to go on with the war against my father, and never rest from molesting him,' and when the Count had sworn to obey, he mounted him on a horse, and himself conducted him in safety to his friends.

Full of anger, the Count of Beaucaire, though he could not meddle with the terms Aucassin had made with his prisoner, resolved to be rid of so troublesome and dangerous a son. He therefore gave orders that he should be taken to a strong tower and kept there in strict captivity.

Meanwhile, in another prison, Nicolette was grieving for Aucassin. And one night in May, as she lay awake, the moon shone brightly across her bed, and in the garden below all the nightingales were singing, and sweet scents rose from the flowers.

She thought of her lover, and all at once it seemed to her impossible to stay another moment in captivity while the world was so beautiful, and Aucassin so close to her; for she knew in which tower he was imprisoned. Very softly she raised herself to look at the old woman who guarded her, and seeing that she slept soundly, Nicolette crept from the bed. She dressed herself in a gown made of rich brocade; she took the bed-clothes and the towels, and she knotted them together to make a long rope, which she fastened to an iron bar across the window-sill, and so let herself down into the dreaming moon-lit garden. The grass was all grey with dew, and to keep her beautiful gown dry, she held it up with both hands as she ran under the trees between the roses. Anything prettier than the little flying figure of Nicolette was never seen. If Aucassin was like a fairy prince, she was the fairy princess, for tiny golden curls hung about her face, and she was slim as a young willow-tree, and her little bare feet, as they touched the daisies in the grass, put their whiteness to shame. So she ran till she came to an unlocked gate, and through this she fled out into the streets of Beaucaire.

The moonlight flung dark shadows from the houses. Into these she crept, and hurried on till Aucassin's tower was reached. The tower was old and ruinous, and through the chinks in its walls she heard her lover lamenting and whispering her name, and presently drawing close in the darkness she spoke to him, and this

is how the old story tells of the words that passed between the lovers :

Nicolette, the bright of face,
Leaned her at the buttress-base,
Heard within her lover dear
Weeping and bewailing her ;
Then she spake the thought in her :
' Aucassin, most gentle knight,
High-born lording, honoured wight,
What avails you to weep so ?
What your wailing, what your woe ?
I may ne'er your darling be,
For your father hateth me ;
All your kin thereto agree.
For your sake I'll pass the sea,
Get me to some far countrie.'
Tresses of her hair she clipped,
And within the tower slipped.
Aucassin, that lover true,
Took them and did honour due,
Fondly kissed them and caressed,
And bestowed them in his breast.
Then in tears anew he brake
For his love's sake.

Aucassin was beside himself with fear and anger at the thought that Nicolette might leave him to go to a ' far countrie ', but while he was telling her that the loss of her would be his death, a company of soldiers came down the street. Now the watchman on the tower, who was a kindly man and glad of this meeting between the lovers, saw with terror their approach, for he knew that the Count of Beaucaire had given them orders to kill Nicolette if ever they should meet her.

' Great heavens ! ' he thought. ' What pity it were should they slay so fair a maid ! Yet what help is there ? For lo ! so deep in talk is she with my young lord that

she heeds not the danger.' And then a clever thought came to him, and he began to sing. He sang as though only for his own amusement, and if the soldiers listened, they took his song for some ancient ballad.

This is how the old story tells of the watchman's device :

Valiant was the watch on wall,
Kindly, quick of wit withal.
He struck up a roundelay
Very seasonably gay.
'Maiden of the noble heart,
Winsome, fair of form thou art.
Winsome is thy golden hair,
Blue thine eye and blithe thine air.
Well I see it by thy cheer
Thou hast spoken with thy fere,
Who for thee lies dying here.
'This I tell thee, thou give ear!
'Ware thee of the sudden foe!
Yonder seeking thee they go.
'Neath each cloak a sword I see;
Terribly they threaten thee;
Soon they'll do thee some misdeed
Save thou take heed!'

'Ah!' murmured Nicolette, as she listened and understood. 'May God bless thee for the grace and for the courtesy which thou hast shown me!' Wrapping herself in her cloak, she crouched low in the shadow till the soldiers had passed, and then fearing to linger, she took leave of Aucassin. Yet what must she do? She could not return to her prison, and if she wandered in the streets she knew well that with the daylight she must be discovered, and perchance burnt to death.

The tower was part of a strong castle, and below the castle walls was a dry moat, and beyond the moat stretched a great forest, and to this forest Nicolette made

her way. By the time she reached its shelter her poor little hands and feet were cut and bruised with climbing up and down the steep sides of the moat, but though she feared the wild beasts and the snakes that lived in the forest, she feared more the thought of capture, and so she ventured into its shade, and under the great trees fell asleep.

She did not wake till the birds were singing, and then she saw a company of herd boys who had driven their beasts into the wood, and were now eating their breakfast by the side of a bubbling spring.

Kind and merry boys they looked, so Nicolette ran towards them.

'Fair children,' she called, 'may the Lord help you !' and 'may God bless you !' replied one who seemed less shy than the rest.

Then Nicolette asked them if they knew Aucassin, the son of Count Warren of Beaucaire, and begged them to go and tell him that if he came hunting in the forest he would find a beast there that he would not lose the chance of catching for all the wealth in the world.

But the boys were frightened, for Nicolette was so beautiful that they thought her a fairy, and though she gave them all the money in her purse she could only get them to promise that if Aucassin came into the forest, they would give him the message. By no means would they go and seek him. So with this half-comfort she was obliged to be content. What happened next is best told just as the old story tells it, in verse :

Nicolette, that bright-faced may,
From the herd boys went her way.
And her journeying addressed
Through the leafy thick forest,

Down a path of olden day,
Till she came to a highway,
Where do seven roads divide
Through the land to wander wide.
Then she fell bethinking her
She will try her true lover
If he love her as he sware.
Flow'rs o' the lily gathered she,
Branches of the jarris tree,
And green leaves abundantly.
And she built a bower of green ;
Daintier was there never seen.
By the truth of Heaven she sware,
That should Aucassin come there
And a little rest not take
In the bower for her sweet sake,
Ne'er shall he her lover be,
Nor his love she.

Then, her bower made, Nicolette crept into a thick bush hard by, and lay down, hoping that her sweetheart would presently pass that way.

In Beaucaire, meanwhile, Nicolette's flight had been discovered, and thinking that since she had disappeared all danger was past, the Count Warren commanded his son to be released, and made a great feast for him, to which he invited all the loveliest ladies in the land. But Aucassin was not to be consoled, and while the sound of music and the noise of revellers echoed through the castle, he went out upon a balcony and mourned. Then presently one of his friends came to him, and understanding his misery, advised him to ride out into the forest a little—'For there,' said he, 'you shall see the flowers and the green leaves, and hear the birds sing, and such sweet sights and sounds are good for sadness.'

So very quietly Aucassin left the castle, and mounting

on his good horse rode into the forest, where before long he came upon the herd boys eating their supper and making merry. No sooner did they see the young lord of Beaucaire than they began to sing a mischievous song, hinting of Nicolette, who that morning had passed their way :

Came the herds from every part in ;
There was Esmi, there was Martin ;
There was Fruelin and Johnny ;
Aubrey boon, and Robin bonny.
Then to speech did one address him :
' Mates, young Aucassin, God bless him !
' Struth, it is a fine young fellow !
And the girl with hair so yellow,
With the body slim and slender,
Eyes so blue and bloom so tender !
She that gave us such a penny
As shall buy us sweetmeats many,
Hunting-knife and sheath of leather,
Flute and fife to play together,
Scrannel pipe and cudgel beechen,
I pray God leech him ! '

Aucassin listened, and spurring his horse towards them cried, ' Fair children, may God help you ! ' ' May God bless you ! ' said the one who seemed less shy than the rest. Then Aucassin began to question them, and after he had given them money, one of them told him about the creature he was to hunt in the forest, which if he could catch he would not for all the wealth of the world set free. And so, full of hope, Aucassin rode on through the briers and thorns, tearing his clothes and wounding himself in his haste, till evening drew near and all the birds were singing good-night to the sun.

Still he rode till the moon rose, and suddenly on coming to a grassy glade he saw, all bathed in silver

light, Nicolette's pretty bower. Then he was full of joy, for he knew that she had at least passed that way, and for the love of her, he determined to sleep a little while in the house of flowers which she had made. But he was very weary with his long ride, and in dismounting he fell, and his shoulder was so badly hurt that it was with difficulty he managed to tie up his horse and to creep into the little bower. There, through the spaces between the flowering branches, he saw the stars, and in spite of his pain he began to sing a little song in honour of his true love. And presently Nicolette, who was hiding not far off, parted the leaves and flowers, and knelt down by his side.

'Fair sweet friend, well be you met!' she cried. 'And you, fair sweet friend, be you well met!' returned Aucassin, joyfully.

But great was Nicolette's grief to find her lover hurt, and at once she set about trying to heal him, and succeeded so well that she put the shoulder back into its place. Then, fearing that search would be made for them, Aucassin set his sweetheart before him on the good steed, and they journeyed away together till they came to the sea. There they found a ship whose captain was willing to take them on board, and after many weeks, during which storms drove them from shore to shore, they landed on the coast of a strange country called the land of Torelore.

It was in every sense of the word a strange country, as you shall hear.

No sooner had Aucassin and his love taken leave of the captain on whose ship they had sailed, than they rode up to the great castle in which the king lived.

'I would see the king,' said Aucassin.

‘That thou canst not do,’ returned the warders, ‘for he is ill, and in bed.’

‘Where, then, is the queen?’ demanded Aucassin.

‘She is with the army,’ returned the warders. ‘There is war in the land, and the queen leads the men-at-arms.’

Very strange news this was to Aucassin, who presently went into the king’s bed-chamber, and found that he was only feigning to be ill. Greatly amazed at such foolishness, Aucassin took a stick and beat the king till he was forced to get up.

‘Sir,’ he said, ‘now take me where your wife is with the army.’

‘Sir, right willingly,’ returned the king, who was terribly frightened by the behaviour of his bold young guest.

So while Nicolette remained in the queen’s rooms, Aucassin and the foolish king mounted their horses and rode to the battle-field. And what a battle-field it was! Instead of fighting with swords and lances, the men-at-arms on either side were hurling roast crab-apples, eggs, and fresh cheeses at one another! For a long time, still mounted on his horse, Aucassin watched the ridiculous battle, and then he fell a laughing so much that scarcely could he speak. ‘Sir,’ he asked at last, ‘are these your enemies? Would you that I should avenge you of them?’

‘Yes, willingly!’ declared the king.

With this permission Aucassin, sword in hand, dashed in amongst the foes, striking right and left. But when the king saw that he was actually killing some of the men, he rode up to him in great alarm.

‘Ah, fair sir!’ he cried. ‘Do not kill them so!’

‘How?’ returned Aucassin. ‘Did you not wish to be avenged?’

'Sir, you have done it overmuch,' replied the king.
'It is not our custom to kill one another.'

By this time, terrified at the sight of a real soldier, the foe had turned in flight, and the king with Aucassin, who greatly marvelled at such fashion of warfare, returned to the castle.

For three years the lovers stayed in the land of Torelore, and though it was the strangest and most fantastic country in the world, they were happy, since they were together.

But one day, on a sudden, a band of Saracens landed, took by storm the king's castle where Aucassin and Nicolette were lodged, and putting their captives into different ships, sailed away towards their own country. To their despair, Aucassin and Nicolette were separated, and the ship in which Aucassin found himself was beaten by storms away from the rest of the fleet, and after tossing for long weeks on the sea it drifted into the port of Beaucaire, his old home.

Judge of the amazement of the crowd who came to look at the almost wrecked ship to discover Aucassin, their young lord, and their lawful ruler. For Count Warren, his father, was dead, and all his vassals hailed with delight the new Count of Beaucaire, and with shouts of joy bore him to the castle.

But no tidings reached him of Nicolette, and though he ruled his land well and wisely, there was no happiness for Aucassin.

Now the ship in which Nicolette was held captive belonged to the King of Carthage, who had with him on board his twelve sons, all of whom were princes. Nicolette's beauty amazed them, and they treated her with great honour, and often begged her to tell them who she

was, for she seemed to them a lady of high degree. But Nicolette could remember little or nothing of her childhood till one fine day the ship neared the city of Carthage, and when she saw its walls and towers, and the lovely country around it, suddenly, as though a veil had lifted from her mind, she remembered that once she had lived in that city. And when she told this to the King of Carthage, he threw his arms round her with great joy, for he knew that she was his daughter who fifteen years ago had been stolen by pirates and carried out of the kingdom.

With great honour then her father and her brothers brought her to their palace, and, knowing nothing of Aucassin, they wished to give her in marriage to a powerful king. But Nicolette thought only of Aucassin, and day and night she pondered upon devices to escape and search for him. At last one night she crept from the palace, and took refuge in the house of a poor fisherwoman who lived by the sea-shore. There, with the juice of a plant, she stained her beautiful white skin, and dyed her golden curls, and dressed herself as a minstrel boy. Then, taking her lute with her, she persuaded the captain of a ship, bound for Provence, to put her on board, and when at last she landed on the shores of that country, she walked from town to town, playing as she went. At last the castle of Beaucaire came into sight, and when at last she entered the courtyard, to her delight she saw Aucassin sitting on a balcony of the tower, surrounded by his barons. He and his lords looked earnestly upon the slim dark-skinned boy who at the foot of the tower stood fingering his lute before he began to sing. At first Aucassin was only conscious of the sweet voice of the minstrel; then with a start he realized that the boy was

telling the story of the landing of the Saracens on the coast of Torelore, and of the parting of Aucassin and Nicolette. He listened eagerly, while the boy went on with the story, singing these words :

Nicolette, the maiden bold,
Is at Carthage, the stronghold,
Which her father dear doth hold,
Who of yonder land is lord.
Husband they would her award,
Felon king of heathenesse,
Nicolette cares not for this,
For she loves a lording lad,
Aucassin to name he had.

Then Aucassin came down from the tower in haste and spoke to the boy, entreating him to go back to Carthage and fetch his 'sweet friend', whom he could not love better than he had ever done, even though he knew her now to be a king's daughter. And the boy, promising that in a very little while Nicolette should be with him, departed.

If Aucassin had followed her he would have been amazed to see the boy entering the palace of the viscountess (for the Viscount of Beaucaire was now dead), and still more amazed to hear the story which made the lady embrace the sunburnt, travel-stained little minstrel.

With a plant called celandine all the stain was removed from the minstrel's face and hair, and clothed in a beautiful gown, Nicolette reappeared more beautiful than ever she had been.

When a week had passed, the viscountess went to the castle of Beaucaire, where she found Aucassin in a fever of impatience and anxiety, and said to him :

‘Aucassin, now make no more lament, but come away with me, and I will show you the thing in the world you love best, for it is Nicolette, your sweet friend, who from far lands is come to seek you.’

So Aucassin ran to the palace of the viscountess, and there, sitting on a dais, all white and golden like a lily, he found his true love Nicolette. And as lord and lady of Beaucaire they lived happily ever afterwards.

FLORIS AND BLANCHEFLEUR

According to tradition, Blanche fleur was the grandmother of Charlemagne, the great king of the Franks who lived in the eighth century. Part of the scene of the story is laid in the East, of which, through their travels at the time of the Crusades, the old writers learnt much, and perhaps imagined more. The story is preserved in an old French romance told in rhyme.

ONCE, long ago, there lived a Queen of Spain who only wanted a baby to make her quite happy. So greatly did Queen Topaz long for a child, that at last, with her husband the king, she went on a long journey to visit the shrine of St. James of Compostella, for she had heard that to women who prayed earnestly at the grave of this holy man, God often sent the children they desired. The journey was full of peril, because at that time the heathen Saracens were overrunning the land. But the king and queen reached the shrine safely, and at last, in answer to their prayers, a little daughter was born to them. She was sweet as a delicate flower, and the prettiest name her mother could imagine for her was Blanche fleur. When the baby was a few months old, the king and queen and the ladies and knights in their train set their faces towards home, overjoyed to be able to take with them the little princess Blanche fleur.

But misfortune was at hand, for a Saracen king, who was fighting in Spain, attacked the travellers. Blanche fleur's father was killed, and she and her mother, Queen Topaz, were carried off as captives to the court of Felix, the heathen king. Now the wife of King Felix had

a little son, born the very day on which Blanche fleur had come into the world. His name was Floris, and almost as soon as they could speak, the children loved one another. From morning till night they played together, and no one ever saw Floris without Blanche fleur. At first King Felix and his queen were amused at their childish affection, and when Floris was seven years old and still refused to learn anything unless Blanche fleur learnt it with him, they agreed to have the children taught together. So the little boy and girl continued to do their lessons together, and every day they loved each other more dearly.

But as time went on, King Felix grew troubled, for he was afraid when he grew a little older Floris would want to marry his beautiful playmate, and as Queen Topaz had been allowed to bring her daughter up in the Christian faith, he could not allow his son to make a Christian captive his wife. So fierce and cruel did Felix become when he thought of this danger, that he actually proposed to kill Blanche fleur, and to force his son to marry as befitted his station. But the queen urged him not to commit such a crime.

'The child has been brought up as our daughter,' she said, 'and her mother, who is now ill, would die of grief. Such an act would certainly shame us in the eyes of our people. Let us, instead, send Floris to my sister. At another court he will see other ladies, and soon forget his childish love for Blanche fleur.'

The king consented. But he had not reckoned with Floris, who refused to go away unless Blanche fleur went with him.

Hand in hand, the girl and boy stood before Felix, and Blanche fleur cried, and Floris stormed and raged.

At last, to pacify his son, the king promised that if he would go to the court of Mountargis, his little friend should follow in fourteen days' time. So with this pledge for his comfort, Floris disconsolately set out on his journey, and reached Mountargis in safety. But in vain he waited for Blanchefleur, who never joined him, and as the days passed, he grew so ill with misery, that messengers were sent from the court to tell King Felix that his son was in danger of death.

Then once more the king's anger blazed forth, and he would have killed Blanchefleur if the queen had not once more interfered.

'For the love of God, do not kill her!' she begged. 'Sell her into captivity if you will, but spare her life. Even now, in the harbour there are merchants from Babylon, and the girl is so beautiful that they will gladly give you gold in exchange for her.'

And indeed when the merchants saw Blanchefleur, they were willing to give a great price for so lovely a slave. Not only did they pay gold to the king, but they gave him also a splendid cup which had been taken at the Siege of Troy.

So it chanced that, in spite of her tears and despair, poor little Blanchefleur was carried away over the sea, and to deceive his son, King Felix ordered a magnificent tomb to be made, so that when Floris returned he could be told that his beautiful friend was dead and had been laid to rest beneath its pile of gold and marble.

Before long, tired of the excuses which his father made for Blanchefleur's delay, Floris rode home, and like a whirlwind swept into the palace to seek his friend. No answer to his demands for her would the king and queen vouchsafe him, and when at last Floris rushed to

Blanchefleur's mother, Queen Topaz, she burst into tears, and told him what she fully believed to be the truth, that her daughter was dead.

The terrible shock of this news almost killed the boy, and when he was taken to the tomb and shown the words upon it, '*Here lies sweet Blanchefleur, loved of Floris,*' he fell down senseless, and for many days he was in so great danger of death that his parents bitterly repented their cruel stratagem.

'We must tell him,' said the queen. 'Better is it he should marry Blanchefleur, than that he should die of grief.'

So the king at last confessed the truth to his son, and when Floris had satisfied himself that the tomb was empty, he swore never to rest till he had found his lost love. No entreaties prevailed with him, and finally seeing no help for it, the king gave him a magnificent escort, and allowed him to go in search of Blanchefleur.

Mounted on a beautiful white horse, whose saddle was richly carved and hung with golden fringe, Floris was starting on his journey when the queen, as a parting gift, put on his finger a magic ring. 'While it is yours,' she said, 'fire cannot burn you, nor the sea harm you; neither iron nor steel can do you hurt.' And so, full of hope, the boy started on his great adventure.

Floris knew that he must go to Babylon, and twice during the journey thither he heard tidings of Blanchefleur. The first time was when he happened to stay at the very inn to which the merchants had taken the young girl before they set sail. There, the hostess seeing that the handsome young knight was too full of care to eat and drink, told him how a lovely maiden called Blanchefleur had once been in that house, and how she

had wept and lamented because she was being torn from her dear friend and sent to a foreign land.

Then Floris filled a golden cup with wine, and gave it to the good woman, begging her to keep the cup because she had spoken kindly of his lady.

Next morning he set sail, and when after many days he reached the harbour of Babylon, again an innkeeper spoke to him of Blanchefleur, whose beauty he remembered. She had landed there, he said, and the merchants had sold her to no less a man than the Emir of Babylon himself. So full of pity was the innkeeper that he tried his utmost to help Floris by giving him a ring which he told him to present to the warder of one of the great gates of the city.

'He is a trusty friend of mine, Sir Daris by name,' said the innkeeper, 'and when he sees the token I have given you, he will serve you faithfully.'

So thanking the man, but with trouble in his heart, Floris rode from the sea-shore towards the great city of Babylon, and at the first gate encountered Sir Daris.

Now Babylon was a marvellous and fairy-like city, and from Sir Daris the young man heard something of its wonders as well as further news of Blanchefleur.

The emir, declared the warder of the gate, lived in a palace the like of which was never seen in the world before. It was built of shining marble, with domes and cupolas and pinnacles surmounting walls that towered like mountains. And high above the topmost dome was a magic red jewel which at night blazed with such radiance that the gardens, the courtyards, and all the crannies and crevices of the building were illuminated by its brilliant light.

A garden was enclosed in the palace boundaries; a

garden more wonderful than the palace itself, for its walls were of precious stones; and set in the midst of grass, and surrounded by trees and glowing flowers, there was an enchanted well. Water of crystal clearness flowed for ever from this well, and in its stream only young maidens might bathe or dip their hands, for if a woman who was married touched it, the water boiled and hissed and became red as blood. Shading the crystal fountain there was a tree covered with lovely blossoms. It was called the Tree of Love, because once a year, when the emir chose a new wife, young girls were made to walk one by one under its shadow, and the maiden upon whom a flower from the tree fell, was married to the Emir, and became his queen. For in this Eastern land men were allowed to have many wives, and the emir, who was a rich and powerful ruler, kept forty-four maidens in a special tower of his palace, from whom in his manner he selected his queen for the year.

Blanchefleur, said Sir Daris, was one of the girls now strictly guarded in the tower. The emir had seen her and was already so much in love with her that there was no doubt he would contrive to make the flower from the tree of love fall upon his beautiful captive, so that while pretending to obey the custom of the land, he might yet win her for his wife.

Floris listened, and though he was almost overcome by the thought of the danger and difficulty of rescuing his little friend, he would not despair.

'Sir Daris,' he said, 'you must help me to enter this palace,' and the good Sir Daris thought long and earnestly till he formed a plan which the young lover lost no time in carrying out. To find his way into the huge castle it was necessary, said Sir Daris, to make friends with the

chief guardian of the palace, who was a man greedy for money and rewards. The following day, then, Floris put on the dress of a mason, and standing before the palace walls, he examined them so attentively as to gain the notice of the warder. Taking him for a spy, the man spoke roughly to him, but Floris, bearing in mind the counsel of Sir Daris, answered that he had been ordered to discover whether it were possible to build a palace like this wonderful dwelling in Babylon, the fame of which had spread into all lands. Still talking with great courtesy, he waited till the warder, hoping to make money, proposed to play a game of chess with him, and having agreed, he allowed his companion to win. On the third day, when Floris had purposely lost heavily, and paid much money to the man, still following the advice of Sir Daris, he gave him a costly golden cup, and by this means entirely gained his good will.

Then, and only then, did Floris tell the warder his real purpose in coming to the palace, and though he was greatly terrified, the man, hoping for still further rewards, agreed to help the boy to enter the maiden's tower.

'But you must give me three days to think of a plan,' he urged, and impatient though he was, the young lover was obliged to consent, and to spend the three days as best he might.

At last the time of waiting was over, and when Floris went again to the palace, the warder received him in a private room which contained huge baskets filled with flowers. 'These are for the adornment of the maidens' rooms,' said the man. 'Baskets such as these are sent to them from day to day, and I will try to hide you under the flowers so that you may enter the tower in safety. Once inside, you must fare as best you can.'

Eagerly Floris consented, and crouched within one of the tall baskets, while his companion heaped over him masses of fragrant blossoms till he was completely covered by the flowers. Then leaving him, the warder sent two slaves to the room with orders to take the basket to the bower of the beautiful captive Blanchefleur. The slaves obeyed, complaining, however, at every step, because of the weight they carried, and when they had at last climbed the tower, they set down the basket in the first room they reached, and departed, glad to be rid of their burden.

No sooner did the sound of their footsteps die away, than Floris, mad with eagerness to see his little love, threw off the flowers, whose scent had nearly stifled him, and was at once startled by a cry.

With roses clinging in his fair curls, and falling about his purple coat, he met the frightened eyes of a strange maiden, and at the same moment, he heard the sound of footsteps. Hastily covering himself once more with the flowers, Floris waited in terror. The door was flung open, and for a time he crouched in the basket, listening to a clamour of girlish voices.

'It was nothing! nothing!' he heard some one presently reply to the babel of questions and exclamations. 'A great butterfly flew out of these flowers just now and touched my face and startled me so much that I screamed aloud!'

Then there was much laughter, and teasing, till by and by all was again silent in the room, and then a voice spoke softly bidding Floris appear.

Cautiously therefore he once more threw off the flowers, and before long the girl, whose name was Clarice, had heard the whole story. Now it happened that Clarice

loved Blanche fleur dearly, and as the girl's chief friend, she knew all about her sweet playfellow, Floris, for whose loss she could never be consoled.

'Wait a little!' she said, and running into her friend's room, which was next to her own, she begged her to come and see a wonderful flower which had just been sent to her.

But Blanche fleur was scarcely to be persuaded.

'I am too unhappy,' she sobbed. 'Floris has forgotten me, and I am a captive, and must be wife to the emir. Do not mock me with flowers!'

At last, however, with gay and loving words, Clarice persuaded the poor child to follow her, and when the maiden saw the flower of which her friend had spoken, no tongue can tell of the joy of the lovers.

So engrossed with one another were Floris and Blanche fleur, and so much was there to say, that when the hour for the maidens' attendance on the emir arrived, Clarice was obliged to go alone to him, and to make such excuses as she might for her friend's absence. The emir was angry, and commanded that the next time he sent for the two maidens, Blanche fleur should not fail to come. But even this warning failed to arrest the attention of the happy girl, and when the second summons arrived, again she did not appear. This time, in great wrath and full of suspicion, the emir drew his sword, and rushing to Blanche fleur's chamber, found her there, and found also Floris.

No words can describe the fury of the emir at this discovery. Guards were summoned, the prisoners were bound and flung into a dungeon, while a great council was summoned hastily to decide on the fate of the lovers. 'Burn them to death!' advised one of the emir's vassals, and first let them be summoned before our assembly to hear their fate.'

So the boy and girl were brought into the great hall of the palace. Now as they entered the hall together, Floris, managed to slip into the hand of Blanchefleur the enchanted ring, his mother's parting gift.

'Keep it, my sweet friend,' he whispered. 'While it is yours, no fire can burn you, no harm can touch you, and you shall not die.'

But Blanchefleur would not accept the ring.

'If you die, sweet and dear friend,' she replied, 'I do not wish to live,' and as Floris also refused to take it, she let the ring slip to the ground. So they were both led before the emir and his great assembly.

Now this story of Floris and Blanchefleur was first told long ago in French verse, and the scene in which they came before the emir for judgement is very charming. Here, in English, are a few lines of the French poem.

Floris was a gallant fair,
Tall and comely was the lad,
Fifteen years of age he had,
All uncovered was his hair.
Purple was the coat he wore,
Tied with laces back and fore,
Just as well as he could do
With his heart so torn in two.
So he stood beside his friend.
He was not more fair than she,
Though she wept most bitterly.
Golden were the curls that spread
O'er her little rounded head;
White as ermine was her brow,
Blue her eyes—not laughing now.
Her red lips could scarcely hide
Tiny pearls of teeth inside.

None so cruel in the crowd
But they needs must weep aloud,
Out of pity, just to see
Children served so cruelly.

And indeed, as the verse relates, when they saw the boy and girl so eager to shield one another, and so determined to die together if die they must, none of the lords and vassals could restrain their sympathy for the young lovers.

‘What is your name?’ demanded the emir of Floris,

‘My name is Floris,’ he replied, ‘and while I was sent to study at the court of Mountargis, my sweet friend Blanchefleur was carried away from me. I came to seek her, and I swear to you that she knew nothing of it till I gained entrance to her tower. As she was ignorant, she can be guilty of no crime. Let me die for both of us.’

‘My lord,’ interrupted Blanchefleur, ‘if I had not been in the tower, Floris would never have entered it. It is my fault. Let me die in his stead.’

‘You shall both die,’ thundered the emir, drawing his sword. ‘And I myself will kill you.’

Then Blanchefleur rushed forward, crying that she would be the first to suffer. But Floris held her back, exclaiming that he was a man, and it was his right to be killed before her.

At this point one of the nobles hastened towards the emir, holding up the ring which the lovers had allowed to fall.

‘My lord, one of them could have been saved!’ he cried, ‘for I overheard what they said to each other. This is a magic ring which would protect its possessor, yet neither of these children would make use of it. I beseech you, let us hear all their story.’

The emir hesitated ; then all at once, touched in spite of himself, he dropped his sword, and burst into tears.

‘ Speak on,’ he said to Floris, and the boy then told to the whole assembly the story of his love for Blanchefleur ; how even before they could speak they had loved each other ; how they had always refused to be separated, and how he had travelled over land and sea to find her. And the emir was so moved by the history of their devotion that he wept again.

‘ Great has been your love,’ he said, ‘ and I will pardon you, and give you honour.’

So before all his court he made Floris a knight, and caused the lovers to sit beside his throne, and in a few days Floris was married to his only love, Blanchefleur, and the emir took for his queen Blanchefleur’s friend, the maiden Clarice. Then, after weeks of rejoicing, the bride and bridegroom returned to Spain, and when King Felix died they ruled the kingdom, and continued to love one another to their lives’ end. They had children and children’s children, and tradition tells us that the great king Charlemagne was a grandson of the beautiful Blanchefleur and of Floris, her true lover.

TOM A LINCOLN

THE 'RED ROSE KNIGHT'

Tom a Lincoln was written by Richard Johnson, in the reign of James I. About twenty-five years before, a book called *Euphues*, by John Lyly, was fashionable at Queen Elizabeth's court, and this story of Tom a Lincoln is in imitation of the style of *Euphues*. It is told in very high-flown language, and is full of what the Elizabethans called 'conceits'—that is to say, far-fetched comparisons, such as these:

'Sacred Dulcippa (quoth hee) in beauty brighter than glistening Gynthia, when with her beames she beautifies the Vales of Heaven. Thou art that Cynthia that with thy brightness doth light my cloudy thoughts, which have many dayes been overcast with stormy shower of love.'

Cynthia means here the moon; and it is in this manner in the story that a gentleman pays compliments to a lady. Besides *Tom a Lincoln*, Richard Johnson also wrote the famous story called *The Seven Champions of Christendom*.

EARLY one morning, years and years ago, all the birds whose nests were near the cottage of a certain Lincolnshire shepherd were startled by a curious sight. They had flown forth at dawn to seek for food, when they saw something lying half concealed in the grass of a hillock near the cottage door. Flying and hopping nearer, they found a tiny crying baby. The child was wrapped in a green silk mantle, so like the colour of the grass that, but for its cries, it might have escaped notice. The birds were sorry for the poor little wailing thing, and they sang to him so sweetly, and the sound of their

whirring wings was so soft, that presently the baby ceased crying and fell asleep.

A little later, when the sun rose, and the countrymen went to their work in the fields, the cottage door opened, and an old man came out, and presently stooped over the sleeping child. In amazement he gazed at it, and at last raising the baby in his arms, he saw round its little neck a purse full of gold.

Returning to the cottage, he showed the child to his wife, who gladly consented to take the little creature and bring him up as her own son.

'God has sent us no children,' she said, 'and this fair boy will be a comfort to our old age.' So the good couple took the child to a priest, and had him christened. Tom a Lincoln was the name they gave him, because of the city near which he was found.

He grew strong and healthy, and though, thanks to the purse of gold, his foster-parents were able to feed and clothe him well, the boy was in every respect treated as their son, and their son he believed himself to be. When he was old enough, therefore, like all the other boys of the neighbourhood, he was set to watch the sheep and to learn husbandry. Yet even as a child he seemed born to be a leader. His friends obeyed him, waited for his commands, and in play chose him for their king, swearing to be his faithful vassals.

But when he grew older, this play turned to seriousness, for the boy was determined not to spend his life looking after cattle and tilling the ground. Calling his friends together one day, he reminded them of their promise to obey him in all things, and made them again swear to follow him to the death. The boys all took the oath he required, and to each of them Tom a Lincoln gave, as

a badge to be worn in their caps, a red rose. Then he commanded that ever afterwards he should be known as the Red Rose Knight; and followed by at least a hundred boys and young men, he led the way to Barnsdale Heath. Here they set up tents, and became highwaymen, robbing all who passed, and spreading fear and dismay in the neighbourhood. Great was the grief of the shepherd at the wildness of his adopted son, and though a very old man now, he journeyed to the heath, hoping to persuade the boy to repent of his evil ways. But before he could explain his presence in the camp, he was taken prisoner by some of the lawless band. They brought him to their leader, who received the old man so tenderly, that the poor shepherd hoped to persuade his son to return to him. In vain he implored; the boy listened dutifully, but while he showed the utmost affection for his father, he steadily refused to return to a life of cattle tending and farming.

'I was not born to herd oxen,' he declared, 'and to me a life of arms, even as a highwayman, is better than the fate you offer me.'

Then at last the shepherd grew angry, and for the first time told the boy that he was no son of his.

'I found you lying in the fields,' he said, 'a helpless babe, for whom without my care and protection there was nothing but death. How do you repay me? By base ingratitude! I thank God you are not my son, for you would have disgraced my name.' He would have said more, but all at once, to the dismay of the Red Rose Knight, the old man fell dead at his feet. The long journey, the grief, and the excitement of the quarrel had killed him.

Very truly did the boy grieve for his foster-father.

TOM A LINCOLN

retain prisoners of his won their release by promising to take the dead shepherd back to Lincoln, where the young man ordered a splendid tomb to be built. To Lincoln he also sent a thousand pounds for a great bell to be hung in the church tower that its voice might keep fresh in the minds of the townsfolk the memory of the good old shepherd. The bell, according to his command, was to be called Tom a Lincoln, and there in the cathedral the city hangs Tom a Lincoln to this day.

Now it chanced that tidings of the brave but wild young man reached King Arthur, who at that time, with all his company of knights, ruled England.

It was a pity, he thought, that so much courage should be put to base uses, and therefore he sent three of his best knights, Sir Lancelot, Sir Tristram, and Sir Triamore, to fetch the Red Rose Knight to his court, promising to him and his followers a free pardon if he would abandon his present life, and wield his sword in a good cause.

Very gladly the Red Rose Knight received King Arthur's ambassadors, and splendidly he feasted them. Then with a hundred of his bravest followers he travelled to the court, where King Arthur greeted him kindly. Before long the young highwayman was made a member of the famous Round Table, and so impressed was the king by his valour that he made him ruler of the army, and sent him to fight in Portugal.

The war was a fierce one, for the King of Portugal had slain some English ambassadors, and King Arthur had sworn never to rest till he had conquered the kingdom. But so marvellously did the Red Rose Knight behave as a leader and as a soldier that in a short time the Portuguese were utterly vanquished, and their conqueror was everywhere hailed as the Boast of England.

When he returned to London, a splendid 'triumph' through the city was arranged for him. It lasted three days, and every tower and window and gallery in the town was crowded with people. Green leaves and boughs were strewn in the streets, and the air was sweet with perfumes, while the bells of all the churches clashed and pealed.

On the first day the banners, the standards, and all the flags of the conqueror were borne through the streets, the coloured silks waving in the wind. Huge cars, gaily painted, followed them, holding golden images and costly spoils taken from the enemy. Upon the second day, borne on chariots, was displayed the glittering armour of the foe, and three thousand men walked in procession. Some carried platters full of gold and silver money, others held aloft between them panels of tapestry, rich with coloured silk and stiff with gold.

On the third day a great company of musicians with drums and flutes and trumpets marched through the streets playing warlike music. After them, with gilded horns and costly cloths on their backs, a hundred and twenty oxen were driven. Garlands of flowers were hung between their gleaming horns, and splendidly dressed young men walked beside them. The coach of the King of Portugal followed. It was filled with his armour, and he himself, with his children and all the gentlemen of his court in deep mourning, walked behind it. So piteous was the sight, that all the spectators were sorry for the fate of the unhappy king, even though he had been their enemy. Then at last, preceded by pages bearing precious stones, came an ivory chariot, in which stood the conqueror, the Red Rose Knight himself.

He was clad in robes of purple tissue ; he held a branch of laurel in his hand, and a laurel crown was on his head. After him, each holding a laurel branch, came all his soldiers, footmen and horsemen, and in this gallant order the procession wound its way to the King's chapel, where a solemn service of thanksgiving was celebrated.

In accordance with knightly custom, the prisoners at King Arthur's court were treated generously, like honoured guests. Indeed, so pleased were they with their entertainment that they lingered long in England, jousting and feasting with the English gentlemen, but the Red Rose Knight, who could not bear to be long in idleness, grew tired of the gay and peaceful life.

' Give me leave, Sir King, to go on a high adventure,' he begged at last. ' For I have sworn an oath never to rest till I have discovered my true parents, and it ill beseems a soldier to rest here in dalliance.'

King Arthur sighed, but because he loved a brave enterprise, he not only gave his knight permission to go, but allowed Sir Lancelot and a hundred other gentlemen to bear him company. So, after bidding the king a courteous farewell, the Red Rose Knight with his followers set sail and began his quest.

Misfortune at first overtook the band of adventurers, for furious storms arose, and for three months the ship in which they sailed beat up and down in the open sea, and no sign of land was visible. At last, when their store of food was nearly exhausted, and they were weak and ill with their sufferings, the travellers came in sight of an island, on which they presently landed.

Towards the centre of the island, on a rocky mountain spur, the knights saw a walled city, and before long, to their amazement, from one of its gates there came a

procession of women. But the women, of whom there were more than two thousand, were armed like men! The sunlight glittered on their silver breastplates and helmets, and down the mountain-side they marched in perfect order.

The Red Rose Knight and his followers, speechless with wonder, waited till two of the women, leaving the ranks, came forward as ambassadors from the rest of the army to address them.

'Go back!' they warned the travellers, 'this is no country for your abode. No men may dwell here. As you value your lives, return to your ship and sail from our shores.'

Then the Red Rose Knight, struggling to overcome his bewilderment, begged the maidens to take pity on poor travellers who were weak and exhausted for lack of food and rest. 'What country is this?' he asked; 'and why must we depart?'

'Sir Knight,' returned one of the ladies, 'this is Faerie-land, a small but lovely country, where women reign alone. This, if you will listen to it, is our history. A king once ruled this island. He was a great warrior, and to carry on his battles he in time took from the country all the men, both young and old. At last, tired of waiting for the return of our fathers, brothers, and husbands, we women formed a great council, headed by the king's daughter, Princess Coelia. This assembly sent ambassadors to the king, praying for the return of the men, since they had been long away. But the king made answer that neither he nor his followers would ever come back till they had won all the conquests they desired. Then we women of this land, angry at such discourtesy, formed a great league, and made a vow.

First we put to death all the little boy children who were left in the realm. Then, when at last the men came homê, we waited till they slept, and slew them also. The king's daughter Coelia was crowned queen, and since then she has ruled, and the women have become soldiers and tillers of the ground and builders of cities, and since we can do without them, we have forbidden men to set foot upon our shores.'

But the Red Rose Knight, who had listened very attentively to this history, had a most persuasive tongue, and before long the ambassador maidens returned to their queen, begging her to see and parley with the travellers. So well did they speak of the knights, that the queen grew curious to see them, and presently, so softened was her heart, that she received all of them in her palace, where they were royally entertained and cared for.

Now, greatly to hêr grief, Queen Coelia, who was young and beautiful, found herself falling in love with the handsome stranger who was her guest. And before long, the Red Rose Knight knew she was in love with him. But when they talked of marriage, he told her of his vow to seek his parents, and said that even if she became his wife he would have to leave her very soon, since nothing could prevent him from keeping the oath that he had sworn. The queen was sad, but she agreed to the knight's speedy departure, and for a time they lived together in her beautiful palace in great joy and happiness. Moreover, many of the ladies at the court, who had also grown rather tired of the lack of men's society, followed the example of their queen, and married, and as some of them had little sons, the Faerie Island was never again an island of women only.

But time went on, and when the ship of the Red Rose Knight and his friends had been repaired and once more stored with food, its sails were hoisted, and the Faerie Queen and her ladies, weeping bitterly, bade their knights farewell.

'When my quest is over, and I have found my true father and mother, I will come back again,' said the Red Rose Knight, and all his followers made to their wives the same promise.

The ladies were left lamenting, but the knights sailed away, and after many days they came to another strange land.

Standing on the deck of his ship one glorious morning, the Red Rose Knight saw that they were approaching a fertile country, in the midst of which was set a city, and in the midst of the city, a palace whose towers and pinnacles stood up grandly against the sky.

Directly they had landed he sent Sir Lancelot and two other knights to inquire who was the ruler of this fair land, and they presently returned with a courteous greeting from Prester John, the governor, who welcomed the travellers to his palace, and sumptuously entertained them. He was glad of their coming, for the fame of England had reached him, and he was never weary of listening to stories about Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.

Now while they feasted together, Prester John began to relate the history of a terrible dragon which spread terror in his realm. It lived, he said, in a cave, close to which grew a tree whose fruit was pure and solid gold, but no man might reach it, nor grow rich from the fruit of the tree for fear of the monster who guarded it.

'Many a time have I proclaimed the adventure,' said

'Prester John, 'and sworn to give in marriage to the conqueror of the dragon my only daughter Anglitora. Many are the knights who accepted the challenge, but all of them are dead.'

Then the Red Rose Knight stood up and vowed for the love he bore to his king and country, that he would brave the dragon, and either kill him or perish in the attempt.

When Anglitora heard his words she was full of joy, for she knew nothing of Coelia, the Faerie Queene, and already she had fallen deeply in love with her father's brave and handsome guest.

Very early next morning, she and her ladies went out on to one of the galleries of the palace, to watch the knight ride down the glen in which, guarded by the dragon, grew the Tree of Gold. Every tower and wall of the city also was thronged with people to watch with bated breath the horseman riding to his doom.

The Red Rose Knight pressed on, and soon the tree with its shining fruit came into sight, and with it the monster. He was bigger than a horse, and when he opened his huge throat to roar, three black tongues darted from it, scattering flames of fire.

Blinded and scorched though he was, the knight struck the monster full on the forehead, but such clouds of smoke immediately arose that he was obliged to deal the second blow at a venture, for he could see nothing but two huge fiery eyes. By good fortune he struck well, for the three black tongues fell at his feet, and though roaring and hissing, the beast rushed upon him, and beat him to the ground, the knight did not lose his wits. As he lay beneath the dragon's huge body he once more used his sword to advantage, for it pierced

through the creature's scales and reached his heart. With one frightful yell of rage the monster rolled over and died.

Then waiting a little to recover from the wounds he had received, the knight dragged the sword from the dragon's body, and on it he stuck the three black tongues. A bough crowded with golden fruit hung over his head, and he plucked it. So with the sword in one hand, and in the other the glittering branch which he held high in the air, he rode in triumph back towards the city.

Shouts of applause greeted him, and as he passed through the street towards the palace, men, women, and children strewed the way before him with leaves and flowers. That night there was a great feast, and a great dancing and making merry round the golden bough. But no one was happier than Prester John's fair daughter, for now she thought she could wed the hero who had slain the dragon.

But Prester John, though he also knew nothing of Coelia, who in Faerie-land was waiting for her knight, was unwilling to keep his promise.

'Shall I allow my child to wed a mere wandering knight who knows nothing of his parentage?' said he, and these words filled the Red Rose Knight with such anger, that he sent word to his followers to make ready, and early next morning they secretly left the palace to set sail. Meanwhile Anglitora had gathered her jewels and her treasures together, and at dawn was ready to follow her knight, from whom she refused to be separated. And so she too fled from her father's country.

On sailed the good ship, and meanwhile the Red Rose Knight told Anglitora how he had left his Faerie Queene

with a promise to return, and that even now they were bound for the island where she reigned.

Anglitora was sad enough at his words, but there was no help for her sorrow, and hour by hour the ship drew nearer to the island of her rival. But suddenly a storm arose, so fierce and terrible, that it was impossible to land on the rocky shore, and for safety the sailors had to turn the vessel and steer into smoother water. For days the storm raged, making it impossible to reach the island. But at last there came a clear morning, and once more the Red Rose Knight stood upon the deck and looked upon a quiet sea. Suddenly upon the water he saw something glittering close to the ship's side, and leaning over, he recognized the dead face of Coelia, the Queen of Faerie-land! She was clad in a gorgeous robe so stiff with gold that its folds bore her up on the waves, and her white face was turned towards him.

Almost distracted with grief, the knight bade the sailors lower a boat and bring the lady on to the ship, and when she was laid at his feet, he saw round her neck a letter.

It was wrapped in waxed cloth to keep the water from it, and presently, weeping bitterly, the knight broke the seals.

It was a piteous letter, for the lady related how she had seen the ship with its flags and banners flying as it approached her island. She had been full of joy till she watched it suddenly turn, and sail away. For forty days afterwards she had stood hour after hour on a rock, waiting for its return. She had caused bonfires to be lighted so that their flames might attract the notice of her knight and bring him to her, and at last, in despair, she had thrown herself into the sea, 'desiring the gods', as she said, 'that they would bring mee either alive or

'dead, to thy presence, to express the true affection I have ever borne thy noble persone.' The letter was signed, 'Thine owne true lover; thy unhappy Coelia, Queene of the Faerie-land.'

In sorrow and mourning, therefore, the Red Rose Knight reached the shores of England, where he was received with thankfulness by King Arthur and all the people. Some while afterwards he married the Lady Anglitora, and for a time lived happily with her. But great as had been his perils and adventures, he was no nearer the discovery of his parentage, and he was still determined to continue his quest, little knowing what a great surprise awaited him.

King Arthur was by this time very old, and when he came to die, he told his knights a secret which for many years he had kept so strictly that no one guessed it. The Red Rose Knight, he confessed, was his son, whom for reasons of his own he had caused to be brought up by the poor shepherds. He had never really lost sight of him. It was he who had wrapped him as a baby in the green mantle; he who had put the purse of gold round his neck, and because the wild and lawless boy was his own child, he had caused him to be brought to the court so that he might learn to be a true and worthy knight. So to his own amazement, and the wonder of all his friends, the shepherd lad found himself in reality a king's son. After his father's death many and great were his further adventures, and when at last he also died, adventures did not cease, for in a strange and wonderful way his two sons met in after life, and long before they found they were brothers, became sworn friends.

One was the son of Coelia, who, brought up by the

ladies on the Faerie Island, was called the Faerie Knight; the other was Anglitora's child, who when he grew up was known always as the Black Knight. Years afterwards these two young men, in honour of their father's memory, rode to Lincoln. The townsfolk adorned the city, and crowded to meet them, while Tom a Lincoln, the great bell which their father had given to the town, rang for an hour in welcome. Here, to the memory of the Red Rose Knight, their father, they built a splendid minster, so that Lincoln grew more than ever famous, and all men know the proverb of three great cities :

Lincoln is, London was, York shall be.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW

In the days of Queen Elizabeth, and long after, country people talked much about the doings of Robin Goodfellow, who was known all over England as a mischievous fairy boy. Shakespeare describes how the old women of his time sat by the fire telling stories of his elfish tricks. In the reign of Charles I a history of Robin Goodfellow was printed, founded, no doubt, on these old wives' tales.

ROBIN GOODFELLOW was a fairy. He has now become one of the most distinguished of all the fairies, for Shakespeare himself knew a great deal about him, and in his play, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, he relates many of the quaint and charming adventures of the elfin boy whom he calls *Puck*. This was one of his names, though as *Robin Goodfellow* he was generally known to country people in Shakespeare's time.

In *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* the fairy who first appears says, on meeting him,

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that sifrewd and knavish sprite
Called Robin Goodfellow: are you not he
That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are you not he?

And Robin Goodfellow replies,

Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.

As the play goes on, we meet him only as Oberon's trusty sprite, serving and obeying that king of Fairyland; one of the elfin court. Yet much more than Shakespeare tells us is known about Robin Goodfellow, and this is the story.

Long ago, when the fairies lived in England, it was their custom to concern themselves very much with the lives of mortals. Often at night they would enter cottage homes, and while the inmates were asleep they not only danced and circled fantastically in the moonlight, they also made it their business to notice what sort of people lived in the homes they visited, whether they were clean and tidy and hard-working, or whether they were slatternly, idle folk. For above all things the fairies loved order and beauty.

Now it chanced that in a certain cottage set like a mushroom in the midst of green meadows there lived a beautiful young maid. She was poor, but everything in her little dwelling was sweet and fresh as a white pink, and she herself was as dainty as a flower, so that it was no wonder that the fairies often came to her little room while she slept, and danced and made merry.

So lovely was the maiden that her fame reached the fairy court, and one night the young girl awoke to find her room bright with moonlight, and filled with a throng of beautiful half shadowy forms. Presently a glittering figure approached her, and when he touched her hand she found herself floating with him towards the open casement window.

In a moment she was skimming over the level fields which lay all hazy and mysterious in the moonlight, and round her, laughing and singing, circled the fairy folk.

All night long they flew through the warm and quiet air, sweeping above streams where the stars seemed to have become entangled with the rushes in the water, floating over woods from which owls fluttered to join the elfin company, sometimes alighting to dance in meadows thick with cowslips.

Hand in hand they danced in a ring, and whenever they rose again into the air, the maiden noticed that a green circle brighter than the rest of the grass was left where their feet had moved. Dawn came all too soon, and almost before it began to glimmer, she found herself back in her little white bed, so sleepy that the next morning she thought all that had happened was a dream. Yet when she went out to milk the cows, there were the fairy rings on the grass!

Again and again on moonlight nights she flew and danced with the fairies, and always the glittering figure who had first approached her, was at her side, declaring his love for her.

By this time the pretty maid was also in love with the stranger who wooed her with his beautiful voice, soft as the cooing of doves and sweet as honey, so without further delay they were married according to the rites of Fairyland.

Time went on, and at last a baby boy was born, and all the neighbours came flocking to the cottage, where besides the baby, another surprise awaited them. The young mother lay upon a richly carved bed. Her head rested upon pillows trimmed with lace fine as cobweb; she was covered with a quilt beautifully embroidered,

and at her bedside a table was spread with food dainty enough for a fairy banquet.

'Who is thy husband?' asked the neighbours in amaze.

'His name I do not know,' replied the happy mother, 'but we have rambled over the countryside together, and he is beautiful to behold.'

'And whence came all these fine things?' asked the neighbours, touching the smooth pillows, and examining the coverlet and the bed.

'That again I do not know,' she replied. 'They come. I see them not till on a sudden they are here.'

Then one of the old women, wiser than the rest, whispered to her and said,

'My child, thou hast married a fairy! This happens sometimes to mortal maids, but look thou say nothing to the gossips in the village!'

Then she looked long at the pretty baby in the cradle, and sadly shook her head, for the old dame knew that a fairy child meant sorrow to his mother.

'We must now see to it that he is well and truly christened,' was all she said aloud.

So very soon a priest was brought to christen the baby, and as no one knew the name of his father, he was called Robin Goodfellow.

The little boy, half fairy, half mortal, grew and thrived, but almost before he could speak the villagers began to talk of his wild behaviour, and when he was a little older his mother always took him with her to market because if she left him at home he would play so many pranks and tease the neighbours so unmercifully that she was wearied with their complaints.

Over and over again she threatened to give him a good whipping for his naughtiness, yet she always forgave him,

For Robin was a fascinating little boy, and she loved him dearly. At last one day, after some particular piece of mischief, Robin saw by his mother's face that she was very angry, and fearing that she would really carry out her threat he ran away from home.

Long and bitterly his mother wept for him, but he never came back, for fairies do not need homes and mothers like mortal children, and the old dame was right in thinking that a fairy baby meant sorrow.

Meanwhile, far into the country wandered Robin Goodfellow, and when night came, he lay down under a hedgerow to sleep, and dreamt a strange dream. First he thought he heard wonderful music stealing from the hills and coming nearer and nearer, till suddenly he was surrounded by a gleaming throng of beings, one of whom was hailed as king, and was more beautiful than the rest. Taking hands they danced round the sleeping boy till suddenly like a wreath of mist they disappeared, and Robin was left rubbing his eyes in the dawn-light.

'It was a dream of course,' he thought, till presently by his side he noticed a long scroll with something written upon it in letters of gold.

Robin bent over it, and found he could read without difficulty what was written there. And strange tidings he learnt! For the first time he knew that Oberon, king of the fairies, was his father, and that he himself therefore was in part a fairy and all the fairy gifts were his. For instance, he had but to wish for what he pleased and it would appear at his command. This was good news, and Robin instantly wished that food and wine should appear. Immediately a banquet was before him, and when he had satisfied his hunger and thirst, he turned again to the scroll.

‘Ho! ho!’ laughed Robin. ‘It seems that I can also take any shape that pleases me. Let me put this power to the test. I would be a horse!’

No sooner were the words past his lips than a fiery steed stood in the place of the elfish-looking boy. Snorting and pawing the ground, it presently began to race over the meadow, till tired of the sport Robin shouted, ‘Now would I be a dog!’

Instantly he was wagging his tail, pricking up his ears, and rushing in circles on the grass.

‘Now a tree,’ said Robin. And there he stood, rooted to the ground, holding out his branches covered with fresh green leaves! Again and again he changed his form till he had assured himself that the fairy gift would never fail, and then at last he resumed his own body and began to wander onwards.

Before very long he met a peasant going to work, and wishing to know the time, he stopped him with the question, ‘Friend, what is a clock?’

The man, a surly looking fellow, replied rudely, ‘A thing that shows the time of day.’

‘Very well then,’ returned the boy good-temperedly, ‘be thou a clock and tell me what time of day it is.’

‘There is no need for me to serve thee,’ answered the man, still more churlishly. ‘Yet will I tell thee this. It is the same time of the day as it was yesterday at this time,’ and he pushed past Robin and went about his business, for he had been told to catch a horse which was running loose in a neighbouring field.

If only he had turned round he would have wondered what had become of the boy in green to whom he had just spoken, for far and near there was nothing alive to be seen except a little bird which flew over a hedge just

in front of him. In the next meadow he saw a horse grazing, and thinking it was the one he had been sent to catch, he approached it with a halter ready to slip over its neck. But this was by no means so easy a task as it looked, for the horse threw up its head, stamped, and then bolted. For miles and miles it led the panting man who followed, and then suddenly stood still.

Angrily the peasant sprang on to its back, and was immediately thrown. Once more, though stiff and bruised, he tried to mount, and no sooner was he seated than the horse made for the river. Into the water it plunged, and began to swim towards the opposite bank, the man clinging tightly to its mane till suddenly there was no mane to hold.

Nothing was left but a bridle and a saddle, which immediately sank under his weight, while a fish swimming in the clear water was heard to laugh, 'ho ! ho ! ho !' as the labourer, dripping and confused, scrambled towards the bank. Strangely enough, as he sat in the sunshine, trying to collect his wits, the man still heard the laughter, but now it came from a boy in green who looked very like the lad to whom an hour or so ago, and miles away, he had spoken rudely.

From this time forth, Robin lived no more in houses. He belonged to the woods; to the fields, to the open air and the sunshine, and to the stars by night. One might come across him, a brown-faced lad with roguish eyes, dressed in ragged green, seated under an oak-tree in the forest, whistling like a blackbird. And then his place would be empty, and a squirrel would run up the tree-trunk against which the boy had been leaning, and stop to throw acorn cups on the heads of the passers-by. Or a wayfarer at night, walking down a lonely road bleached

white by the moon, might see him approaching, waving his cap in greeting, and all at once there would not be even so much as his shadow left, and it was only a screech-owl that darted across the road, brushing the traveller with his wings, and freezing the blood in his veins by its wild uncanny cry. For Robin was always full of mischief, and loved to play tricks upon the mortals to whom with part of his nature he belonged. Yet unless people injured or offended him, his tricks were never ill-natured, and to gentle and harmless folk he was often good and helpful, though very uncertain in his moods. Once, for instance, he showed his kindness to a poor girl who had to work very hard in her cottage home. She was a pretty maid, always gay and merry, though she toiled from morning till night-

Robin knew her well by sight, for often he came to her threshold, sometimes disguised as a bird, sometimes as a kitten, or a mouse, and always he found the dwelling as clean and fresh and pretty as his own mother's had been.

One morning when the pretty maid came downstairs, she found to her amazement and delight that nearly all her work was done! The flax was spun, the butter was churned, the rooms were swept and everything was as spick and span as though she had been busy all night. Day after day, the same thing happened, till the girl's curiosity was so roused that she determined to come down at night to watch for her unknown friend.

She waited till all was quiet in the house, and then very softly she crept down the oak staircase which led into the kitchen, and there a charming sight met her eyes.

The big raftered room was full of moonlight, and black on the floor lay the shadow of the lattice window

through which, as she stood half-way up the stairs, there came a pretty lad dressed in ragged green. Very softly he moved about the kitchen in the moonlight, standing at the churn, turning the spinning wheel, sweeping the floor, and singing a sort of nonsense rhyme the while so softly and sweetly that it sounded as though a bird were singing in its sleep. The maid listened to the words of the song, and this is what she heard:

- And can the physician make sick men well?
And can the magician a fortune divine?
Without lily, germander, and sops in wine?
With sweet brier
And bon-fire
And strawberry wine •
And columbine.

When Saturn did live, there lived no poor,
The king and the beggar with roots did dine,
With lily, germander and sops in wine,
With sweet brier
And bon-fire
And strawberry wine
And columbine.

Before she could believe it possible, all the work was done, and the boy in green, after drinking a bowl of milk at one draught, leapt through the window and disappeared. Astonished and pleased, the maid went back to bed thinking how she could reward the pretty lad.

‘Poor boy! he is lightly clad,’ she thought. ‘Through the slits in his doublet I saw his bare white skin. Tomorrow I will leave him a warm little coat to cover him.’

The next night, therefore, she left the little coat in the kitchen, but there happened to be no bowl of milk on the table as usual.

Again she watched and waited, and presently to her

joy saw the slender green figure jump in at the window. The boy looked round him, lifted up the coat, then let it fall with a disgusted air, and broke into a song, dancing about the room and making no attempt to work.

'Tis not your garments, new or old,
That Robin loves: I fear no cold.
Had you left me milk or cream
You should have had a pleasing dream.
Because you left no drop or crumb
Robin never more will come.

With the last words he made a flying leap from the window, and the poor maiden never saw her fairy friend again.

But many other people saw him, or at least guessed, when something strange and unexpected happened, that Robin Goodfellow had been in their company.

Once he appeared at a country wedding as a fiddler playing so well that the guests were delighted, and were willing to pay a great deal of money to the old man who coaxed such dancing tunes from his fiddle. In high good humour they all sat down to supper, when suddenly all the candles went out. The men were boxed on the ears, and began to quarrel, each one declaring that his neighbour had struck him. All the pretty merry girls were kissed, and the ill-tempered shrewish maidens had their arms pinched black and blue.

Then, when the mingled laughter and screaming and quarrelling was at its height, the candles were once more magically lighted, and there sat the demure fiddler ready to play the company back into good humour. All went well till at last, according to an old custom at wedding feasts, a great posset was brought in. It was made with cream, and Robin, who loved cream better than any-

thing else, could contain himself no longer, and instantly transformed himself into a bear.

Right and left fled the bride, the bridegroom, and the wedding guests, leaving the bear to eat up all the posset. No sooner was the bowl cleared than the bear too disappeared, and as no one could find the fiddler, no one paid anything for the music, and Robin, who cared nothing for gold, fled away into the darkness, leaving the echo of his laughter, *ho, ho, hoh !*.

He was in the mood for mischief that night, and fortune favoured him, for while he wandered over a heath, he came upon a company of young men who had been making merry at a village tavern, and had now lost their way.

Instantly Robin transformed himself into a flickering light, and the youths, taking it for the glimmer of a candle in some cottage window, followed it joyfully. 'Over hill, over dale, through bush, through brier,' they ran, led by the wandering fire, till the dawn broke, and then at last they heard a laughing voice singing :

Get you home, you merry lads :
Tell your mammies and your dads,
And all those that news desire,
How you saw a walking fire.
Wenches that do smile and lisp
Use to call me Willy Wisp.
If that you but weary be,
It is sport alone for me,
Away unto your houses go
And I'll go laughing, ho, ho, hoh !

Thus the poor lads were well punished for staying too long and drinking too much at the village inn.

Though he dearly loved the green world where mortals dwelt, its meadows, its woods, its quiet streams, Robin

never forgot that he belonged also to another country, that mysterious land where Oberon reigned, 'the land of Faërie,' and Oberon also was mindful of his son, and made him free of that strange world.

For one night when Robin was sleeping under the stars, he heard 'the horns of Elfland faintly blowing', and waked from his slumber to see the fairy king with all his train of elves clad in green coming towards him over the moonlit fields. Before him walked Tom Thumb, the fairy piper, who made melody so sweet that the nightingales hushed their voices to hear him play, the fishes in the streams raised their heads from the water, and furry creatures crept from the woods and stood entranced to listen.

The music ceased, and Oberon taking Robin by the hand, said, 'Son! whensoever thou hearest the fairy piper, follow, follow! for he will lead thee into Fairyland, which is thy country as well as mine. This very night we will take thee with us to that land, but first a roundel and a fairy-song!'

Then all the little elves rushed forward, and taking hands round Robin, who stood in their midst, they danced till they made a bright green ring on the grass, giving him welcome. 'A song!' they cried. 'A song! Robin of the sweet voice shall sing to us.'

So to fairy music, Robin sang:

Round about, little ones, quick and nimble.
In and out, wheel about, run, hop, or amble.
Join your hands lovingly: well done, musician!
Mirth keepeth man in health like a physician!
Elves, urchins, goblins all, and little fairies,
That do filch, black, and pinch, maids of the dairies,
Make a ring on the grass with your quick measures:
Tom shall play, and I'll sing for all your pleasures.

Pinch and Patch, Gull and Grim,
Go you together,
For you can change your shapes
Like to the weather.
Sib and Tib, Licke and Lull,
You all have tricks, too ;
Little Tom Thumb that pipes
Shall go betwixt you.
Tom, tickle up thy pipes
Till they be weary :
I will laugh, ho, ho, hoh !
And make me merry.
Make a ring on this grass
With your quick measures :
Tom shall play, I will sing
For all your pleasures.
The moon shines fair and bright
And the owl hollows,
Mortals now take their rests
Upon their pillows :
The bats abroad likewise,
And the night raven,
Which doth use for to ca..
Men to Death's haven.
Now the mice peep abroad
And the cats take them.
Make a ring on the grass
With your quick measures :
Tom shall play, I will sing
For all your pleasures.

Robin's song was received with a clapping of little hands which sounded like the rustle of forest leaves, and all the weary elves threw themselves down upon the grass, or climbed to seat themselves on the top of mushroom, while Robin begged a favour of Oberon in return for his music.

'As yet I lack full knowledge of Fairyland,' he said.

'True the names of many of your elves are known to me, yet I would fain know the offices of each. Command then, O king, that in turn they may relate them to me.'

Oberon, who was seated on a grassy hillock, then called some of the sprites by name, and Gull, Grim, Pinch, and Sib stepped from the throng and bowed before their king.

Gull, Grim, and Pinch were curious goblin men with ugly, merry faces and pointed ears, but Sib was a delicate little fairy in a filmy robe hung with dewdrops that sparkled in the moonlight.

'I am Pinch,' began one of the little goblin men. 'From house to house I go, and black and blue I pinch idle wenches who sweep no floors and scour no pots and pans to keep them bright and sweet. But in the shoes of dainty maids I often drop a silver coin which brings them luck.'

'My name is Gull,' said the second goblin, an ugly little creature who danced about like a piece of quicksilver while he talked. 'I plague all mortals who do not reverence the fairy folk. In the dark I scream in their ears with feigned voice. I give them nightmares. Sometimes I take their babies from the cradles, and leave them fairy changelings. At night I steal the milk from the dairies and feast with brothers Grim and Patch and Pinch.'

'Grim I am called,' the third sprite began. 'Often I change my form, and as a screech-owl I frighten foolish people, but the wise ones know I have no power to harm them.'

My nightly business I have told,
To play them tricks I use of old:
When candles burn both blue and dim,
Old folks will say, "Here's fairy Grim!"'

he added, dancing and capering as he broke into verse.

'And what says Sib?' asked Robin, as the dainty little fairy approached him.

'I go not often into the world by night,' she told him, nor do my sister fairies. 'Tis the elves, the goblins, and the sprites who trick the mortals. Yet sometimes when the good wife has gone upstairs to sleep, we creep into her kitchen, my sisters Tib, Licke, Lull, and I, and there we warm and dress our fairy children, while Lull sings them to sleep. If all is sweet and clean, fresh water in the ewers and dainty linen in the press, the good wife finds at dawn silver in her shoes, and silver coins in the basins.'

'The dawn! The dawn!' cried a little elf standing on a mushroom, and pointing to a streak of light in the east.

'Back to Fairyland!' was Oberon's command, and in a moment the fairy piper was at the head of the throng, and the whole company of goblins, sprites, elves, and fairies, with Robin in the midst of them, swept over the meadows like a trail of mist, and vanished into thin air. But the music of the fairy piper still echoed lingeringly amidst the hills, and ceased only when the gates of Fairyland had closed upon Robin and his friends. And though the fairy boy often returned to the world of mortals and played his pranks and talked to men and maids, he never told the secrets of that land. They are secrets still, beautiful secrets of which only now and again we catch a word or imagine a glimpse when, like Robin Goodfellow, we hear the music of the fairy piper, very faint and sweet and far away.

ROBIN HOOD

Though we hear so much about Robin Hood in ballads, very little is known for certain about his life—not even where or when he was born. Some say he lived in the reign of Richard II. At any rate it must have been some time in the fourteenth century. But what history lacks, legend supplies, and Robin Hood has always been, and will remain, one of the most popular figures in English romance.

This is the story of another Robin. No fairy was he, but a strong and stalwart man. Yet he too lived in the greenwood and slept under the stars, and he too played tricks upon his enemies and was kind to poor and simple folk. Long, long ago he lived, when there were mighty forests in England, and strong castles: when knights were brave, and all ladies were fair.

Once Robin Hood had been a rich knight, with lands and a castle of his own, but for some reason unknown to us he had fallen into disgrace with the king. His lands were forfeited; he was made an outlaw, and any one who pleased might kill him and never be brought to judgement for the deed.

But Robin Hood was hard to kill, for very soon he made himself so greatly feared by the powerful, and so greatly loved by the poor, that, robber though he was, no man lifted a hand against him. He had trusty friends, too; Will Scarlett, Little John, and Friar Tuck were amongst the band of brave but lawless men who followed him, and with them and Maid Marian, his pretty sweetheart, Robin lived merrily in the forest of Sherwood.

About the beginning of his friendship with each of his most famous comrades there is a story, and first we will discover how Will Scarlett came to be a member of the robber band.

One morning when Robin Hood stood on the outskirts of the forest of Sherwood, bow and arrow in hand, he chanced to see a handsome youth pass by. The gallant was dressed all in scarlet, and Robin saw at a glance that he was happy and light of heart; for he sped over the grass with a dancing step, singing as he went. But the next morning, when once more Robin went forth to hunt the deer, he saw the same gallant returning in a very different mood. There was no dancing now, no 'chanting a roundelay', but, instead, a slow and dragging step and heavy sighs, 'alas! and alackaday!' So pitiful was the young man's plight that Robin's heart was touched, and stepping from the shelter of the greenwood tree, he spoke to him.

'What ails you, fair youth?' he asked. 'But yesternorn I watched you pass this way, gay and merry as becomes your years. Now you go heavily, and sigh as you go.'

'Alas!' answered the gallant. 'Yesterday indeed I was full of joy, for I was on my way to wed a fair maid whom I have loved long and truly. But when I came to her house I found that her parents had promised her in marriage to an old but wealthy knight, and this is their wedding day.'

'Is it so, indeed?' asked Robin Hood. 'Now what will you give me if I restore to you your true love?'

'I have no money,' said Will Scarlett sadly. 'I have no gold and no lands. But if this thing should come to pass, I swear to be your true man and faithful follower.'

. 'So be it!' cried Robin. 'How many miles is it to thy true love?'

'Five short miles,' said the young man, and Robin, only stopping to take off his Lincoln green doublet and to wrap himself in a cloak, hastened over the plain till he came to the church.

'Who is this?' asked the priest when Robin Hood entered. 'A harper, say'st thou? Welcome then, and play for us.'

'First must I see the bride and bridegroom,' returned the harper.

At that moment there entered a lovely maiden so richly dressed that she shone like glittering gold, and with her a grave old man, the wealthy knight.

'This is no fit match!' cried the harper. 'And now that we have come to the church, the bride shall choose her own sweetheart.' So saying he put his horn to his mouth and blew three blasts, which were followed by a trampling of feet as four-and-twenty bowmen, all in Lincoln green, marched into the churchyard. The young lover was at the head of this company, and turning to the bride, Robin said, 'Here is thy true love, and ye shall be married before we depart from this church.'

'Not so!' cried the priest, 'for they must be asked three times in the church according to the law of the land.'

Then Robin went up to the priest, pulled off his robe, and put it upon Little John, bidding him marry the lovers. And this he did, 'asking' them *seven* times, in case three should not be enough.

'Who gives me this maid?' said Little John, going on with the service.

'That do I!' returned Robin. 'And he that taketh her from her true love shall dearly rue the day.'

' So Will Scarlett and his sweetheart were married, and with their escort of archers dressed all in Lincoln green, they returned to the forest and feasted and made merry, and Will Scarlett was evermore Robin's true man and faithful follower.¹

Little John and Robin Hood came together in a fashion different but equally strange. It chanced one day that Robin was alone in the greenwood, and to cross a stream he had to walk along a narrow bridge. But coming across the bridge was a man very tall and strong, who blocked the way.

' Get thee back ! ' cried Robin, haughtily.

' I am not your man,' returned the stranger with equal pride, and Robin Hood at once drew his bow.

' You would shoot one who is unarmed except for a staff ? ' asked the man, disdainfully, and Robin, who had not thought of this, at once threw aside his bow and arrow, and took an oaken stick from his belt.

' Now will we fight till one of us falls into the stream ! ' he declared.

And fight they did, till a blow from the stranger sent Robin staggering into the water. As soon as he had struggled to the bank he blew his horn, and in a few moments a company of fifty archers came rushing to the riverside. Seeing their master dripping wet, they would have set upon the stranger if Robin had not restrained them.

' This is a brave fellow,' he declared, ' and if he will make one of us here in the forest I shall be well content.'

¹ The ballad from which this story is taken is called *Robin Hood and Allan-a-dale*. But in one version of the tale it is Will Scarlett who thus wins his bride.

Then the man held out his hand to Robin and said, 'Right willingly. And if you would know my name, it is John Little.' But at this Will Scarlett laughed, for the stranger was at least seven feet high, and very stout, and broad.

'Let us christen him Little John!' he suggested, and the name was repeated by all the men with great mirth, and was evermore his.

'Come, it is time to feast!' said Robin, and with laughter and shouting Little John sat down to eat and drink with the merry men in the forest. He was then clad in green from head to foot, and Robin gave him a long-bow. 'Thou shalt be an archer,' he said, 'and shoot the deer with us, and live bravely as we do. For while bishops have gold in their purses, Robin Hood and his men can never want.'

So Little John lived with the forest band and learnt the rule which Robin had laid down for his followers. No poor man, whether he were labourer, yeoman, knight, or squire, was ever to be taken prisoner or harmed in any way. He might go free, fearing nothing in the forest. But 'proud bishops' and rich merchants might never escape, and as all the outlaws knew, there was one man for whom they must be ever on the watch, and he was the High Sheriff of Nottingham, their leader's bitter enemy.

It was some time later that Friar Tuck joined the robber band, and this was the manner of his coming.

One lovely spring-time there was a great trial of skill amongst the archers in the greenwood, for Robin Hood set his men to try who could shoot a hart five hundred paces off. It was Little John who won the contest, and Robin was delighted with his friend's success.

There is none to match with thee ! ' he cried.

'Is there not ? ' asked Will Scarlett, rather scornfully.

'I know a friar who dwells in Fountains Abbey, and he would outmatch both him and you and all your yeomen at shooting with the bow.'

Then Robin was angry, and swearing that he would never eat nor drink till he had proved the truth of Will Scarlett's words, he armed himself with coat of mail and steel cap, took his bow and a quiver full of arrows, and went alone to Fountains dale by Fountains Abbey. A river flowed through the dale, and walking on its bank there was a stout and jolly friar. He was a warlike friar, for he was as fully armed as Robin Hood, except that he carried no bow and arrows.

Springing from his horse, which he tied to a tree, Robin shouted to the man to carry him over the water, and the friar at once took him on his great back, and carried him across.

'Now must you take me back again,' was all the friar said when they reached the farther bank, and Robin, who was rather amused, at once complied. But no sooner did they reach the place from which they had started, than he leapt again upon the friar's back and urged him once more into the water.

Not a word was said, till half-way across the friar suddenly ducked down, and Robin was thrown into the river. He struck out at once, and swimming to a bush of broom, pulled himself up on to the bank, and quickly fitting an arrow to his bow, shot at the man.

In a flash the friar's shield went up, the arrow slid aside, and as he climbed the opposite bank he cried good-humouredly to Robin to shoot away.

And Robin shot and shot, but never could hit the friar, who at last came across the river and drew his sword, bidding his adversary do the same.

Again they fought, till Robin Hood felt that he was nearly beaten, and he cried out, 'Grant me one boon.'

'With all my heart,' agreed the friar.

'Let me blow three blasts on my horn,' said Robin.

'Blow away!' returned his stout enemy. So Robin wound his horn three times, and up ran his merry men, fifty strong.

Friar Tuck looked at them, and turning to Robin said, 'Tis for me now to ask a boon.'

'With all my heart,' agreed Robin.

The friar whistled twice, and in a few moments fifty great dogs came leaping through the underwood by the river.

'Fifty dogs for fifty men!' cried the friar. 'Alas, I am left for you.'

Then followed a great fight between Robin's men and the dogs, who caught in their mouths the arrows shot by the men, and held them fast.

At last, seeing that the archers were growing faint, Little John called to the friar to keep the dogs back, but before the pack was called off many of them lay dead, shot by the arrows of that famous marksman. The battle was ended, but there were still terms to be made, and the bargain ran thus.

The friar was to leave Fountains Abbey for ever, and become one of Robin Hood's men. For this he was to be paid a golden noble every Sunday, and on every holy day he was to receive a set of new clothes. So Friar Tuck joined the robber band, and his name was famous through the land, and is famous still.

About Maid Marian we know very little, but there is a pretty, old story which tells how she too came to make her home in the greenwood, and how she risked her life for love of Robin Hood.

She and Robin had fallen in love with each other when he was a knight of high degree and she was a noble lady. Then trouble came, and her true love was forced to flee, and Marian could hear no tidings of him except that there were some who said he lived in Sherwood forest. Day and night she wept for him, till on a sudden a thought came to her, and she dressed herself in boy's clothes, took quiver and bow in her hand, hung a sword by her side, and went to the forest, where she wandered amongst the leafy aisles hoping to find her lover. At last she met a man tall and strong, clad all in green, who began to quarrel with her, and Marian was forced to draw her sword and fight.

Very bravely she fought till she wounded her enemy, and she herself was hurt, and sank to the ground.

'Enough! enough!' cried the man. 'Thou art a brave lad. I am Robin Hood, and thou shalt live with me and my merry men and hear the nightingales sing in the forest!'

And Marian, almost fainting, was roused by the voice of her lover whom she had not known before, so strange he looked in his archer's dress, and so changed was he, and in a few moments Robin learnt that 'the brave lad' was none other than his true and faithful sweetheart.

Then there was rejoicing in the greenwood. Little John went out to kill a deer for the feast which was held 'all in a shaded bower', and Robin Hood drank a health to Marian, and all his men answered the toast, shouting till the forest rang again. So Maid Marian became one of the band, and with Little John, Will Scarlett, and Friar Tuck, her name will always be remembered.

THE STORY OF THE POOR KNIGHT

This is one of many stories about the kindness of Robin Hood to the poor and the unfortunate.

It happened once that for several days there had come no traveller through the forest, and Robin was always anxious to have a 'guest' at dinner-time. The guests he preferred were rich merchants or proud bishops, for they were made to pay very heavily for his hospitality, usually in fact to the extent of all the wealth they carried with them!

'Take thy good bow in thy hand,' he said to Little John, 'and go with Much the miller's son, and Will Scarlett, as far as Watling Street, and see that thou come not back without a guest to sit at our table to-night.'

So the three men departed and went to Watling Street, which was the high road along which travellers journeyed, and there they looked east and west, but no one could they see.

But as they waited, they presently espied a horseman coming along the road. He was poorly dressed, and he rode wearily; one foot was out of the stirrup, the reins were hanging on his horse's neck, and he had pulled the hood of his cloak almost over his eyes.

Little John went forward to meet him, and with great courtesy addressed him.

'Welcome to the greenwood, gentle knight,' said he. 'My master awaits you.'

'Who is your master?' asked the knight.

'Robin Hood,' returned Little John.

'I have heard much good of him,' said the stranger, and without more ado he followed the three archers

into the forest, where Robin Hood himself came forth to greet him.

‘Sir, I have waited for you fasting three hours!’ he assured him. ‘Come now, and we will dine together.’

So they dined royally in the forest, and the knight declared it was long since he had tasted such good fare.

‘What will you pay me for it?’ asked Robin, ‘for it is not fitting that a knight should be beholden for a dinner to a yeoman like myself.’

‘Alas!’ answered the knight, ‘for very shame I could not offer you what remains to me of my wealth.’

‘Search his coffers!’ ordered Robin, and Little John spread his cloak upon the ground and poured out upon it the contents of the stranger’s wallet, which did not amount to ten shillings in all.

Then Robin’s heart was full of pity for the unhappy stranger, and he asked him how he came to be in such dire straits of poverty, for he saw that his clothing was threadbare, and that he seemed wretched and forlorn.

In reply, the knight told him a sad story. Once he had been rich in gold and lands, but to save his son from punishment for a crime, he had been obliged to set his lands in pawn to a certain prior of St. Mary’s Abbey, who was entitled to keep them for ever if the sum he had lent could not be returned before a certain day, which was now almost at hand.

‘How much is the sum?’ asked Robin when the story was told.

‘Four hundred pounds,’ answered the knight.

‘Go to my treasury,’ said Robin, turning to Little John, ‘and count me out four hundred pounds.’

Little John obeyed, and in returning, he said, ‘Master, his clothing is thin; give him a knight’s array, for you

have cloth of scarlet and green, and no merchant in merry England is richer.'

'Take three yards of each colour, and see that you give good measure,' returned his master, and Little John used his long-bow to measure the cloth generously.

'Now must you give him a horse!' he cried.

'Take the grey courser and a new saddle,' said Robin.

'He should have a palfrey also,' declared Much the miller's son.

'And a pair of boots,' added Will Scarlett, for he is a gentle knight.'

'And I will give him golden spurs,' said Little John, 'if in exchange he will pray for all this company!'

'But a knight must not ride alone,' put in Robin, 'and therefore Little John shall go with him to be his squire.'

'And when shall I repay you?' asked the knight, almost speechless with joy at his own good fortune.

'This day twelvemonth,' said Robin Hood. 'I will meet you here under the greenwood tree.'

So with his trusty squire the knight rode away, blessing the name of Robin Hood, and reached St. Mary's Abbey just in time to redeem his lands from the rich abbot, who had hoped to gain them for ever at small cost to himself.

HOW LITTLE JOHN TRICKED THE PROUD SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM

Meanwhile, though he served the knight as trusty squire, Little John was not without adventures of his own, and one of them brought him very close to that sheriff of Nottingham who was the bitter enemy of all

the forest clan. It happened that a trial of skill at shooting was to be held near the place where he and his new master were staying, and Little John, who was one of the best archers in England, could not resist the temptation to take part in the sport. Slim wands were set up as marks for the arrows, and three times following he shot and split the wand, so that the crowd wondered and shouted, and the sheriff drew near to watch.

'This man is the best archer I ever saw!' he exclaimed, and he sent for Little John and asked his name.

'Men call me Reynold Greenleaf,' he returned, giving a name that reminded him of the beautiful forest for which he pined.

'If thou wilt dwell with me, I will pay thee twenty marks a year,' declared the sheriff, who longed to have such a splendid marksman in his train of followers.

'With my master's leave, that I will gladly do,' said Little John. And with the knight's consent, he bound himself for a year to the sheriff, though little he meant to abide by his word, and much he hoped for revenge upon the ancient enemy of the forest band.

Scarcely had he entered his new service when he made first a foe and then a friend of one of the men in the household, and in this manner it befell.

The sheriff had gone hunting, and Little John was left at home one day, fasting. Neither the steward, the butler, nor the cook would give him anything to eat, and at last he broke open the buttery door and helped himself to food and wine. Only the cook, a stout man and a bold, dared to withstand him, and Little John bade him draw his sword and settle the dispute by a fight.

'By my faith!' cried Little John, after they had been fighting an hour, 'thou art the best swordsman

that ever I saw! If thou could'st shoot as well, my master, Robin Hood, would welcome thee in the green-wood!

'Put up thy sword!' said the man, 'and I will follow thee.'

So they took counsel together that the same night they would be with Robin in the greenwood, and before they set out the cook led Little John to the treasury, where they stole vessels of silver and three hundred pounds in gold, which they carried off to Robin Hood in the forest, telling him that the sheriff sent him a greeting with the costly gift.

Robin laughed loud at the jest, and on a sudden there came into Little John's mind the thought of a trick by which the sheriff might be delivered into his master's hands.

Five miles he ran in the forest till he came upon his enemy hunting with hound and horn, and when he had found him, he knelt before him as though breathless with good tidings.

'Dear master,' he cried, 'I have just seen a fair sight. There is a hart in the woods whose colour is green, and with him seven-score of deer feeding. I feared to shoot, for the hart's antlers are long and sharp. Come thou and see this fair beast.'

Eagerly the sheriff followed as Little John led the way, till presently Robin Hood stepped into the glade, and Little John shouted, 'Lo, here is the master hart!'

'Come, fair sir, and sup with us,' begged Robin Hood with a great show of courtesy, and the poor sheriff was obliged to watch while the table was spread with his own silver!

'Make good cheer,' said Robin as they sat down side

by side. 'For the love of Little John, thy life is granted thee, and thou shalt stay with us here in the greenwood, and I will teach thee to be an outlaw !'

The sheriff was in despair. 'For all the gold in Merry England I would not dwell here !' he cried pitifully, and when his fur-lined gown and his warm shoes were taken from him and, wrapped in a mantle of Lincoln green, he was forced to lie all night with the merry men in the forest, his prayers for mercy grew yet more piteous.

'Let me go, and I will be the best friend that ever thou had'st !' he begged.

'First thou shalt swear me an oath,' was Robin's reply, and on the outlaw's bright sword the proud sheriff of Nottingham swore not only never to hurt him nor his merry men 'by water nor by land', but also to help them whensoever it was in his power.

So, stiff and sore from his night in the open air, and trusting never again to see the woods in which he had suffered such discomfort, the sheriff went home, and there was mirth in the forest.

THE RETURN OF THE POOR KNIGHT TO THE FOREST

Meanwhile the knight whose lands had been saved by the timely help of Robin Hood, rode from St. Mary's Abbey singing joyfully, and at last reached his home in Uttersdale. His lady met him at the gate, and cried to him anxiously, 'Sir, is all your fortune lost ?'

'Be merry, dame,' said the knight, 'and pray for Robin Hood !'

He told her then of his adventure in the forest, of the kindness of the outlaws, and how with the money lent

him by their leader he had been able to repay the abbot and reclaim his lands.

‘And now,’ said he, ‘I must stay at home till I have saved four hundred pounds with which to pay my debt.’

So the knight waited till he had the money ready to pay, and then with a hundred men all clothed in his livery of white and red, he set out for the forest, taking with him a gift which he knew would delight the heart of Robin Hood. A hundred bows and arrows he carried with him; each arrow an ell long, fletched with peacock’s feathers, and decorated with silver—a seemly sight. And so, richly burdened and arrayed, he journeyed on, entered the greenwood, and presently found the robber band.

‘God save thee, Robin Hood, and all this company!’ he cried, springing from his horse, and kneeling before their leader.

‘Welcome be thou, gentle knight,’ returned Robin. ‘Hast thou gained thy lands? Is all well with thee?’

‘Yes, and for that I thank God and thee,’ returned the knight. ‘Here are the four hundred pounds thou didst lend to me.’

But Robin laughed. ‘Nay, nay!’ he said, ‘put up thy gold, for I have already been paid. But yesterday we met a fat monk crossing the forest, and him, according to our courteous custom, we asked to dine with us. He paid so well for his dinner that thy debt is covered, gentle knight, and as he was a monk of St. Mary’s Abbey, the prior has after all lost what he lent to thee. . . . But what are these bows and feathered arrows that thou bearest with thee?’ he added.

‘A poor present unto thee,’ said the knight, and with

great content Robin took the gift, and bade Little John go to his treasury and bring out four hundred pounds.

‘The monk counted it over to me,’ he said, laughing again. ‘Take it, gentle knight, and buy a good horse with it, and gilt spurs and fine array. And if ever thou art in need again, come to Robin Hood.’

So the poor knight returned with joy to his castle, and more than once afterwards, when they were in trouble, he was able to help Robin Hood and his merry men.

• THE COMING OF THE KING

A treacherous man was the sheriff of Nottingham, and Robin Hood did ill to trust him, as you shall hear.

The night he was forced to spend in the forest was never forgotten by him, and in spite of his promises not to hurt the forest men, he never ceased to think of his revenge, and at last his wicked plans were laid.

A great shooting contest was proclaimed, to which all the best archers of the north were invited, and with them came Robin Hood and his band. Robin easily outstripped the other archers, but just as he was about to receive the prize of a golden arrow, the sheriff gave orders to his men to seize him and his followers. Then followed a fierce fight, in which the sheriff's men were beaten back, though Little John was wounded so sorely that he begged his master to slay him so that he should not fall alive into the hands of his enemy.

But never would Robin consent to his friend's death while he was alive to save him! Taking Little John upon his back, but putting him down sometimes to let fly another good arrow at the foe, he fled with him to the castle of the knight whom he had befriended, and

gladly did the good Sir Richard receive him and all his men.

The gates were shut, the drawbridge was raised, and safe within strong walls the forest company feasted and laughed at the enemy.

Full of rage, the sheriff sent word to the king that Sir Richard had protected the outlaws. 'He will be lord of the north country and set thee at naught,' he wrote, and the king's anger was roused, and he vowed to come himself and punish both the knight and Robin Hood.

But the sheriff could not wait for the king's vengeance, and as Robin had escaped him and was living safely once more in the forest, he plotted to seize the knight instead. Setting a watch, he caught Sir Richard one day when he was hawking by the riverside, and, bound hand and foot, the knight was led to Nottingham.

But Sir Richard's wife was a gallant woman, and mounting her palfrey, she rode into the greenwood to seek her husband's friend.

'God save thee, good Robin!' she cried when she found him. 'My wedded lord is the prisoner of the proud sheriff. Never wilt thou let him be shamefully done to death?'

'Hasten! hasten!' cried Robin to his merry men, who armed themselves with all speed and followed their leader to Nottingham town, where in the streets they overtook the sheriff and his prisoner, and cried out upon him for a traitor. Robin then bent his bow and, pierced by the arrow, the sheriff fell. Before he could move again, out flashed Robin Hood's bright sword, and his enemy's head lay in the dust. There followed a fierce fight between the men in green and the sheriff's followers, who

were at last beaten off, and Robin rushing to the knight, cut his bonds and took him away in triumph to the forest.

But now the king's anger was still more fiercely kindled, and delaying no more, he rode in with a train of followers to Nottingham, where he caused a proclamation to be made that any one who should smite off the head of Sir Richard should inherit the lands forfeited by that knight who had dared to protect an outlaw.

'Ah! my liege lord!' said an old servant of the king's, 'never will you hear of the death of this knight while Robin Hood lives to shelter him, for no man will raise his hand against the outlaw.'

And the king learnt to prove the truth of these words, for though he waited six months at Nottingham he could hear no tidings of Robin and his friend, for no man would betray them.

Then at last a forester craved speech of the king, and advised him thus.

'There is but one way to meet Robin Hood,' he said. 'You, O king, and five of your best knights, must disguise yourselves as monks, and ride through the forest. Then will the robber band come forth to take your wealth, and thus will you entrap their leader.'

So, following the woodman's counsel, the king and his knights disguised themselves thus, and rode through the greenwood, where before long they met Robin Hood.

'Sir abbot!' he cried, taking the bridle of the king's horse, 'you must abide with us awhile. We have need of your gold, for we are poor men who live only by shooting the king's deer.'

Now to kill the king's deer was in those days punished

by death; and well might Robin have quaked if he had known to whom he was speaking!

'I have but forty pounds,' said the pretended abbot, 'for I have lived these many days with the king in Nottingham, and there have I spent much gold. But I carry with me a letter from the king bidding thee come to Nottingham.'

With these words he showed Robin the letter, and when he saw the royal seal, Robin knelt courteously before the abbot.

'I love no man in all the world as I do my king!' said he. 'And you are welcome, Sir monk, for bringing me tidings from him. To-day you shall dine with me.'

Meanwhile he took the forty pounds from the king, kept half of it, and returned the rest. 'That is for your own spending,' he declared in courtly fashion.

'I give you many thanks,' returned the king.

Then Robin put his horn to his lips, and at the sound of the blast up ran his merry men, and knelt before their master in so loyal a fashion that in his heart the king said, 'These men obey him more readily than any of mine obey me!' And he wondered and looked at Robin curiously, while before his eyes many of his own deer were slain by the famous archers, and cooked and served up at the dinner which he and his knights shared with the outlaws.

'Now shall you see what sport we make!' said Robin, when the meal was ended, and immediately his men began to set up rose garlands, through which the archers shot at targets beyond. Never had the king beheld such wonderful shooting, and never perhaps had he taken part in such a rough and homely sport, for one of the rules of the game was that if an archer failed

to shoot through the rose garland, he received a great buffet on the head!

At last Robin Hood himself missed the garland, and his men cried out laughing that he must also take the blow. 'I give you leave to smite me,' said Robin, turning to the abbot, who rolled up his sleeve, and dealt the leader such a blow that he fell to the ground.

'Thou art a stalwart friar!' began Robin as he picked himself up, and then he paused. The monk's hood fell back and he saw the face of the king! At once Sir Richard, who was with the company, fell on his knees, Robin Hood did the same, and all the wild outlaws followed their example.

'Mercy, my lord the king, for me and my men!' cried Robin.

'Mercy you shall have, if you and your men leave the forest, and if you will come to my court and dwell with me,' returned the king.

So taking leave of the forest, Robin departed to the court, with seven-score men, to serve the king.

But Robin was not made for courts, nor were his free merry men. One by one they deserted, and slipped away to the forest, and Robin too wearied for the sunlight of the glades and the fresh sweet scents of the greenwood till he could bear his life no longer. So he went to the king to crave a boon.

'My lord the king,' said he, 'I have made a vow to go to a chapel in Barnesdale for penance. Grant me leave therefore to depart that I may fulfil my vow.'

'Seven nights I give thee leave,' answered the king, and then thou shalt return.'

And Robin knelt before his lord, and went his way, not to the chapel, but to his dearly loved forest. Early in

the morning he reached the greenwood, and his heart leapt when he heard the birds singing and saw the mighty trees and listened to their sweet murmur.

He raised his horn, and all the outlaws knew that mighty blast! Forth they came, leaping and shouting with delight, and soon with lifted hoods they were all kneeling before their leader.

'Welcome, our dear master!' they cried. 'Welcome under this greenwood tree.'

And Robin, once more at home, rejoiced, and never, never more returned to the court, where he had pined like a wild caged bird.

Twenty-two years he lived in the forest, and at last, through the treachery of a woman, he met his death.

THE DEATH OF ROBIN HOOD

Robin fell ill, and the prioress of Kirkleys was a kinswoman of his, skilled in healing the sick.

'I will go to her,' said he to Little John, 'and ask her of her charity to bleed me.' For in those days this was the great remedy for all illness.

'Take half a hundred good bowmen with thee, master!' answered Little John, for he knew that the prioress was related also to an enemy of Robin Hood, and he was uneasy.

'Never would she do me harm!' declared Robin, wroth with his friend for his suspicions. 'And if thou art afraid, Little John, stay thou at home!'

So Robin left Little John in anger, and went alone to the priory, where his kinswoman met him with a great show of courtesy and kindness. Taking him to a little room she opened a vein in his arm, and then left him to

bled to death. For some time Robin feared no treachery, but when he found that the prioress did not return, that the door was locked, and that he had no means of stanching his wound, he remembered the warning of his friend, and knew he must die.

Weaker and weaker he grew, but at last he managed to crawl to the window, and to blow three blasts on his famous horn. Far in the forest Little John heard that cry for help, and on he rushed towards the abbey, which he entered, breaking bolts and bars, till he came to the little turret chamber where his master was dying.

'Grant me one boon!' he begged, overwhelmed with grief and rage. 'Let me burn down Kirkleys Hall, and all this nunnery!'

'Nay! nay!' whispered Robin. 'I never hurt a woman in all my life, nor any man in her company. Not so will I end my life. Give me instead my bow and arrow. Lead me to the window, and let me shoot one arrow, and there where the arrow falls shall my grave be digged.'

So Little John supported his master, and for the last time Robin bent his bow, shot the arrow from the window, and died in the arms of his faithful friend. And they buried him where the arrow fell, with a green sod at his head, and another at his feet. And by his side they laid the bow and arrow which had always been sweet music to this brave dweller in the greenwood.

Robin Hood and his merry men are gone for ever. But their memory is in England yet, and while it lingers in the minds of poets the outlaws in their greenwood can never really die. In the old English ballads we hear again the sound of the horn, the rustle of the forest

leaves, and the laughter of the brave company clad in Lincoln green. In later times Keats wrote a beautiful lament for Robin Hood and his followers, and in our own day the poet Alfred Noyes tells us his dream of the awakening of Robin Hood; how in the dawnlight in Sherwood forest the dead come back again, the deer flee before the singing arrow, and the air is full of shouting and laughter as 'through the crimson dawning' the robber band goes by.'

Here are some lines from the 'Robin Hood' of Keats, and a few verses from 'Sherwood'; the poem by Alfred Noyes:

ROBIN HOOD

.
No, the bugle sounds no more,
And the twanging bow no more;
Silent is the ivory shrill,
Past the heath and up the hill;
There is no mid-forest laugh
Where lone Echo gives the half
To some wight, amazed to hear
Jesting, deep in forest drear.

On the fairest time of June
You may go, with sun or moon,
Or the seven stars to light you,
Or the polar ray to right you;
But you never may behold
Little John or Robin bold;

.
Gone the merry morris din;
Gone the song of Gamelyn;
Gone the tough-belted outlaw
Idling in the 'grene shawe';
All are gone away and past.
And if Robin should be cast

Sudden from his turfèd grave,
 And if Marian should have
 Once again her forest days,
 She would weep, and he would craze :
 He would swear for all his oaks
 Fall'n beneath the dockyard strokes,
 Have rotted on the briny seas ;
 She would weep that her wild bees
 Sang not to her—strange ! that honey
 Can't be got without hard money !

So it is : yet let us sing
 Honour to the old bow-string !
 Honour to the bugle horn !
 Honour to the woods unshorn !
 Honour to the Lincoln green !
 Honour to the archer keen !
 Honour to tight Little John
 And the horse he rode upon !
 Honour to bold Robin Hood
 Sleeping in the underwood !
 Honour to Maid Marian
 And to all the Sherwood clan !

SHERWOOD

Sherwood in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake ?
 Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the brake,
 Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,
 Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy horn.

Robin Hood is here again : all his merry thieves
 Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves,
 Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
 In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Friar Tuck and Little John are riding down together,
 With quarter-staff and drinking-can and grey-goose
 feather.

The dead are coming back again ; the years are rolled
away
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Where the deer are gliding down the shadowy glen,
All across the glades of fern, he calls his merry men ;
Doublets of the Lincoln green glancing through the may
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Calls them and they answer : from aisles of oak and ash,
Rings the *Follow ! Follow !* and the boughs begin to
crash ;
The ferns begin to flutter and the flowers begin to fly,
And through the crimson dawning the robber band goes
by.

Robin ! Robin ! Robin ! All his merry thieves
Answer as the bugle-note shivers through the leaves :
Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.